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NO POSERS IN THIS THING!

Defining legitimacy among vogue dancers

Master's Thesis
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Abstract of master's thesis

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Abstract

Voguing has its roots in the 1960s' Ballroom culture and LGBTQ community where it evolved from drag queens' competitions into a distinctive style of urban dance. Like many other urban cultures, it lacks formal education and thus, validation and legitimacy stems from within. As the popularity of the style has brought many new dancers to voguing, it has also created an opportunity for commercialization which in turn has raised some questions about the competence of the commercial dancers and teachers - in order to gain the right to teach others, to 'be a pioneer', one should first gain the respect of the community by going through certain stages.

The focus of this study is on legitimacy, status and qualifications in fields that do not have an official educational system. In previous academic literature, legitimacy has been studied for example from institutional, organizational, legal and professional point of view as well as authorities' right to govern but for the purpose of this thesis, it is considered to stand for meeting the requirements set by a community and thus, gaining the right to represent a group. Ballroom community and voguers offer an excellent environment for this study as a spontaneously formed community with a relatively extensive and advanced power structure.

In this study, the components of legitimacy among vogue dancers are investigated in a qualitative study. Academic literature regarding legitimacy and urban cultures is overviewed in this thesis, and theoretical framework for understanding the components of legitimacy is used to conduct a thematic analysis on empirical material.

The main findings of the study highlight the communal nature of Ballroom culture and prove that perception of legitimacy among voguers is created in a social setting. Amount of time and involvement in the community, respect from and towards others, quality of work and education play a significant role in defining one's legitimacy. Additionally, membership in a house brings legitimacy to members to some extent but even non-members can and are often considered just as legitimate. Earnings from artistic work, self-identification and the relevance of background were explored. The findings show that none of these hold legitimating value in the scope of this study. Finally, this thesis sheds light on the process of gaining legitimacy and status, and shows that unlike in urban cultures in general, power structures are strong, clearly defined and stable.

Keywords Legitimacy, Professionalism, Voguing, Urban culture, Dance, Artist

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Voguingin juuret ovat 1960-luvun ballroom-kulttuurissa ja LGBTQ-vähemmistöjen yhteisöissä, joista se kehittyi drag queenien kilpailuista omaksi tanssilajikseen. Kuten monet muut urbaanit kulttuurit, siltä puuttuu muodollinen koulutus, minkä vuoksi pätevyys ja validiteetti kumpuavat yhteisön sisältä. Tanssilajin tultua suositummaksi ovat uudet tanssijat löytäneet sen pariin, mikä puolestaan on luonut mahdollisuuden kaupallisuudelle. Tämä on nostattanut kysymyksen uusien opettajien ja tanssijoiden pätevyydestä - saadakseen oikeuden opettaa muita, olla pioneeri, tulee ensin saavuttaa yhteisön kunnioitus tiettyjen vaiheiden kautta.

Tämän tutkimuksen pääpaino on pätevyydessä, pätevöitymisessa ja statuksessa aloilla, joilla ei ole virallista koulutusjärjestelmää. Aiempi akateeminen tutkimus on käsitellyt pätevyyttä muun muassa institutionaalisena, orgaanisaatiotasolla, oikeudellisena sekä ammatillisena käsitteenä sekä viranomaisten oikeutena määrätä, mutta tässä tutkimuksessa se ymmärretään oikeutena edustaa tiettyä ryhmää täytettyään sen asettamat vaatimukset.

Tässä kvalitatiivisessa tutkimuksessa käsitellään pätevyyden osatekijöitä vogue-tanssijoiden keskuudessa. Ensin pätevyyttä ja urbaaneja kulttuureita tarkastellaan akateemisen kirjallisuuden avulla, minkä perusteella luodaan teoreettinen runko pätevyyden osatekijöiden ymmärtämiseksi. Empiirinen tutkimus valottaa aihetta lisää.

Tutkimuksen löydökset korostavat ballroom-kulttuurin yhteisöllistä luonnetta ja osoittavat, että pätevyys vogue-tanssijoiden keskuudessa syntyy sosiaalisessa tilanteessa. Käytetty aika ja osallistuminen, arvostus, työn laatu sekä koulutus osoittautuivat merkittäviksi tekijöiksi pätevyyttä määritellessä. Lisäksi jäsenyys talossa lisää pätevyyden vaikutelmaa tiettyyn pisteeseen asti, mutta myös tanssijat, jotka eivät ole talon jäseniä, voidaan nähdä pätevinä. Ansiotulo, identifioituminen sekä taustan merkitys olivat myös tarkastelun alla. Tämä tutkielma valottaa lisäksi pätevöitymisen prosessia ja statuksen saavuttamista ja osoittaa, että toisin kuin muissa urbaaneissa kulttuureissa, valtarakenteet ovat vahvoja ja selkeitä.

Avainsanat Pätevyys, ammatillisuus, voguing, urbaani kulttuuri, tanssi, artisti

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1. INTRODUCTION

> *"We're all for teaching - that is how we learn - but some teachers and instructors just started walking or have barely walked, haven't won any Balls, have had no battles, they may not have even existed on the scene before they got the chance to teach. Knowing a move or three and one dip does not make you an instructor. I'm not knocking your hustle at all and I am glad you have the opportunity to expand and further the culture - but as I say every place I go - domestically/internationally "we see you" - just as you've seen others in this scene - and you need to get yourself together, get trained, battle, participate, learn, and educate yourself because believe me - that tap on the shoulder is forthcoming… No posers in this thing!"*
>
> Vjuan Allure, a vogue pioneer

Vogue as an art form started emerging within the ballroom community in the 1960s, when drag queens had the tradition of 'throwing shade' at each other as to impress the judges in competitions. This later developed into a more structured and acrobatic style of dance which started to gain recognition outside the black gay community, much thanks to Madonna's popular music video *"Vogue"* (Birardi Mazzone and Peressini, 2013). In the 2000s, voguing has become more and more popular among other groups of dancers as well. Furthermore, it has been used in music videos, ad campaigns and commercial shows, causing some indignation and accusations of cultural appropriation in the voguing community. Moreover, the popularity of the style has brought many new dancers to voguing, but it has also created an opportunity for new teachers and a more commercial way of providing education. This in turn has raised some questions about the competence of the commercial dancers and teachers - in order to gain the right to teach others, to 'be a pioneer', one should first gain the respect of the community by going through certain stages. The competence to teach voguing is not achieved through formal education, but it is granted by the community (Birardi Mazzone and Peressini, 2013; Jackson, 2002).

Even though voguing as an art form has been studied before (for example Birardi Mazzone and Peressini, 2013; Jackson, 2002; Davenport, 2017), legitimacy as a voguer deserves a closer look. Voguing, as many other street cultures, has a history that is related to oppression and empowerment of minorities (Harkness, 2010; Chang, 2005). As the amount of teachers and dancers in the genre is growing, it is important to pay attention to the deviant demands of the street dance culture and in this case, voguing in specific.

Moreover, I find this topic to be personally interesting, as I used to work as a dancer, dance teacher and choreographer in street dance and hiphop. During this time, I learned that one of the most important skills that a teacher and a dancer can have is knowing the culture you are borrowing from, and to make sure to pass on the knowledge of the history and culture to your students instead of just teaching them the moves. A teacher that is not considered to have reached a certain level of 'realness' by living by the rules of the community is not respected or thought of as a professional.

This is a topic that is repeatedly discussed within the community but still lacks deeper understanding. Abfalter (2012) covers authenticity and respect as a part of leading teams in performing arts in his article, and notes that being respected as an artist is also based on one's ability to be authentic – to stay true to oneself and one's art. This also implies that respect and authenticity go hand-in-hand: to be respected as an artist you need be authentic. Of course, it is worth mentioning that being *authentic* may not be enough to be *legitimate*. Finally, as voguing and ballroom culture emerges from the black gay community (e.g. Berkowitz and Belgrave, 2010; Birardi, Mazzone and Peressini, 2013), it has a particular role in empowering minorities. As Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) point out, drag queens in balls feel that they are able to break down dominant gender and sexual structures. In that case, when sexual transgression is such a vital part of the culture, can someone who has not experienced the oppression of a non-white gay man actually be authentic in what they are doing? In other words, can a white, straight woman, for example, be considered legitimate in the same way as a black gay man doing vogue, and if so, how has she reached that status? When cultural background plays such a vital role

in the identity of the community, is it acceptable for the privileged to gain financial gain from the culture?

1.1 Research aim and questions

The focus of this study is on legitimacy, status and qualifications in fields that do not have an official educational system. In previous academic literature, legitimacy has been studied for example from institutional, organizational, legal and professional point of view as well as authorities' right to govern (e.g. Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2008; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Tyler, 2006) but for the purpose of this thesis, it is considered to stand for meeting the requirements set by a community and thus, gaining the right to represent a group (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2008). Ballroom community and voguers offer an excellent environment for this study as a spontaneously formed community with a relatively extensive and advanced power structure.

At least Ellemers, et. al (2013) and Bernstein, et al. (2010) have studied status as a socially constructed phenomena instead of a hierarchical structure. Even though the discussion around this topic has gained popularity in recent years, respect and status through certain traditions and initiation deserve a closer look. To help with pinpointing a reference group, I will look into urban culture as an empirical framework to determine the specifics that define the environment at hand. As Harkness (2010) mentions, art communities such as urban dance communities have their own ways of validation, which stems from collective consensus on what is right and what is real. For example, Chang (2005) discusses the reasons and repercussions behind the birth of hip-hop culture and explains that the racial segregation and formation of ghettos in New York in the 1950s and onwards resulted in the development of certain characteristics that define street culture communities, such as break crews and rappers. Moreover, Harkness (2010) looked into communities and culture around rapping in Chicago and noticed that in some cases, white rappers from middle-class neighbourhoods were deemed incompetent based on their social-economic and ethnic background, even if they met the demands regarding the flow of rapping,

vocabulary, or creativity. Karen Ho (2009) found similar results from Wall Street, where choosing to wear wrong type of shoes could destroy a career.

This study aims to increase understanding on the factors that define legitimacy among vogue dancers and teachers and therefore strives to answer the question, *how is legitimacy defined in the ballroom scene?* This question is divided into two sub-questions,

1. *What are the components of legitimacy in a ballroom community?*
2. *How is legitimacy perceived in the ballroom scene?*

1.2 Limitations

This thesis is a qualitative study using interviews as primary empirical data and documentation as secondary data to find out how legitimacy of artists is defined in academia as well as by voguers in the ballroom community. This thesis explores different criteria and evaluate their significance to construct a coherent entirety of the definition and perception of legitimacy. The focus of the study is limited to voguers in the Finnish ballroom scene – even though some foreign representatives are interviewed – due to the otherwise extensive scope of the topic. Furthermore, the interviewees were chosen based on involvement in the community and reachability, resulting in some distinguished members being left out. This might skew the results as the representation of interviewees is not as diverse as I had initially hoped for.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The structure of this thesis follows common guidelines for an academic research paper. The thesis consists of a literature review as well as empirical research on the phenomenon.

Chapter 2 introduces academic literature on definitions of artist legitimacy and focuses on voguing and ballroom as empirical framework. The literature review starts with definitions of legitimacy in general and gradually moves on to investigate the issue from an artist's point of view. After this, defining components of legitimacy and their significance are presented and discussed to form a framework for this study. Chapter 2

ends with a brief review on the history of voguing and ballroom and presents characteristics peculiar to voguing.

Chapter 3 introduces the empirical research approaches of the study. Research method and methodical decisions of the study are presented and validated in the chapter. The empirical research of this thesis consists of a qualitative study on the definitions and perception of legitimacy among voguers and uses interviews as well as a documentary and a panel discussion as resources for data.

Chapter 4 introduces the empirical findings of the thesis. The chapter starts by presenting and analysing the interviews regarding legitimacy and continues to investigate findings from videotaped material in order to shed light on the topic in a wider sense. The chapter ends with a summary and discussion of the main findings.

Chapter 5 concludes the study as a final chapter. The main findings of the study are concluded to answer the research question. Finally, suggestions for further research are discussed.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I will review the definition of legitimacy, especially in the case of artists, based on previous literature. Furthermore, I will study the history and special characteristics of ballroom and voguing as a cultural framework.

2.1 Legitimacy as a social concept

As briefly mentioned earlier, legitimacy has been studied from several point of views - including organizational, psychological, institutional, and professional - and while approaches may vary between fields of study, several scholars agree that legitimacy is a social process (Tyler, 2006; Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2008). Tyler (2006, p. 376) defines legitimacy as a "belief that authorities, institutions, and arrangements are appropriate, proper, and just", and points out that when people think something is legitimate, they feel personally obligated to defer to that. Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2008) describe it as a process in which widespread beliefs within a group about how things should be or typically are done create strong expectations of what will happen. They also point out that although not all individuals within the group necessarily hold the same values, norms and beliefs, they are likely to act in accordance with the rules they think others have accepted. Thus, the social order that is based on those norms and rules becomes valid in their eyes even if they personally disagree with it. It is also noteworthy that this collective consensus is only apparent to individuals but not necessarily actual – in theory, it is possible that no one in the group views something or someone as legitimate but as they all think that everyone else considers it legitimate, it becomes legitimate. Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2008) address this by stating that although legitimacy is mediated by the actions and beliefs of individuals, it is fundamentally a collective, social process. According to them, this process goes through four stages, proceeding from local validation to widespread, general validation.

First, social innovations or objects emerge at the local level as a response to local events or situations. Second, they are locally validated by linking them to an existing broader

cultural framework. Third, after being locally validated, they are introduced and diffused into new local situations. At this point, the objects need much less explicit justification than in the beginning – as they have already been validated in other local situations, the actors in new situations are likely to accept them as facts instead of testing and evaluating their legitimacy. Finally, once the objects have achieved validation in multiple local situations, they become generally accepted as legitimate (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2008). Moreover, Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway (2008) argue that once a new social object has gained legitimacy, it is fairly stable and not easily challenged, although delegitimation is possible. Therefore, objects must continuously be able to convince others that they deserve the position they are in (Tyler, 2006).

2.2 Legitimacy as an artist

For decades, scholars and researchers have tried to outline the components that define legitimacy in different fields, and several proposals have been made. In the medical context, for example, legitimacy and professionalism in one's field is often described as accountability, respect towards others, constant learning, integrity, knowledge, and being certified (e.g. Martimianakis, Maniate and Hodges, 2009; Purkerson Hammer, 2000; Van de Kamp, et al., 2004; Butler, 2000). In their study about sociological interpretations of professionalism in the medical field, Martimianakis, Maniate and Hodges (2009) propose that professionalism can be understood as (1) a list of traits and behaviours (defined criteria for competence, standards for training, and certain type of behaviour), (2) a role played in society (profession defines and regulates one's behaviour in a society instead of individual traits), (3) a social construction (professionals *profess* and claim to know more about certain matters than other, using this as a way to define their status and legitimacy in a society), and (4) means and display of social control (stating that professionals are able to define what is 'true' in their field, creating a dilemma of *whose* standards are viable and *why*). Butler (2000) notes in her working paper that while professional status in certain fields – medicine, law, and education, to name a few – is granted from a certificate or a degree, identifying an *artist* is not as simple due to the ambiguous nature of art: thus, the ability to pass as an artist is strongly linked to legitimacy. While the definitions above

help us in understanding professionalism and factors that support legitimacy in general, considering the scope of this study, it is necessary to discuss definitions of what makes an artist legitimate.

Researchers became increasingly interested in the study of the arts and artists in the 1980s and 1990s, and several sociology, economy and political science researchers handled the issue. Mitchell and Karttunen (1991) point out that artists can be studied either as a part of a professional group to assess their social and economic position, or as qualities and capacities that make a person *a true artist* – a legitimate artist – and that these two cannot be completely separated from each other. In other words, to conclude 'who is an artist', we must first know 'what makes an artist'. They continue to note that while artists often evaluate themselves and others based on internal, conceptual and aesthetic criteria, support structures and outsiders tend to use external and practical criteria. However, according to the authors, it is also noteworthy that artists' organizations may use external criteria for defining artists while the user of art may use internal criteria. Koff and Mistry (2012) add to this by concluding that especially in the case of dance teachers, legitimacy stems from criteria such as standardized training or licensing; a specialized set of skills and knowledge; involvement in the art community outside teaching, experience, or occupational status; or it may be identified by the individual herself.

Jeffri and Throsby (1994; in Karttunen, 1998, p. 8) called for specific criteria for defining a professional artist and concluded that three factors could be used for evaluation: marketplace (earning one's living from art practice); education (having trained as an artist); and peers (recognition from those who are already accepted in the profession). Similarly, Frey and Pommerehne (1989) provided a more detailed list of attributes for identifying artists, including amount of *time* devoted to and *earnings* from artistic work, *reputation* among general public, recognition and respect among other artists, quality of artistic work, membership in a professional artists' group or association, qualifications and education, and subjective self-identification as an artist.

Being economists, Frey and Pommerehne (1989) focused primarily on *how to spot a true artist* for socio-political and economic purposes, but their proposal can be used on the

organizational level of artists – and in this case, voguers – as well to determine what factors make the community view someone as a legitimate artist. Butler (2009) reviewed these principles in her more recent working paper that examined which identification methods were most frequently used in previous literature, and found that 'membership in a professional artist group' was the most common method (32%). What's more, earlier studies quoted by Butler handled earnings and time spent mostly as one entity, putting 'the amount of paid time devoted to artistic work' second (24%), followed by 'professional qualities' (14%), referring to primarily formal education. Finally, 'reputation and recognition' as well as 'self-identification' both scored 10.5% of mentions. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that from a societal point of view, membership was considered to be the most valid criteria for passing as an artist, followed by the time spent and money earned from artistic work, education, and finally, reputation among peers and self-identification.

Finally, due to the history and subtext of ballroom culture and voguers as an urban subculture born from oppression of certain groups of people, it is essential to consider the significance of one's ethnic background, gender and other special characteristic related legitimacy in urban cultures. McLeod (1999) found that among rappers in Chicago, perceived authenticity defined one's legitimacy regardless of their skills or talent. He concluded six dimensions of authenticity (Table 1.), as shown below.

Dimension	Authentic	Unauthentic
Socio-psychological	Staying true to oneself	Following mass trends
Racial	Black	White
Political-economical	Underground	Commercial
Gender/sexuality	Hard (masculine)	Soft (feminine)
Demographical	Streets	Suburban areas
Cultural	Old school	Mainstream

Table 1. Dimensions of authenticity, McLeod (1999)

Based on Jeffri and Throsby's 1994 study (cited in Karttunen, 1998), Frey and Pommerehne's (1990) listings, and McLeod's (1999) findings, I will use the following criteria to form a framework for further analysis on what defines legitimacy among voguers.

1. amount of time devoted to artistic work
2. earnings from artistic work
3. recognition and respect among other artists and reputation among general public
4. quality of artistic work
5. membership in a professional artists' group or association
6. qualifications and education
7. subjective self-identification as an artist
8. background

Next, I will delve more deeply into these concepts.

2.2.1 The amount of time devoted for artistic work

Using 'devoted time' as an indicator for an artist's legitimacy has many perks. For one, it identifies artists in a consistent and subjective matter, and data is most likely easily retrievable from federal databases (Butler, 2000). Furthermore, it shows a certain type of commitment to the art, suggesting that it is more than just a hobby. As Bain (2005) found, artists tend to disregard the work of others if they feel that they have not showed adequate struggle and dedication, while credibility and legitimacy are associated with long-term commitment and compromises. Nonetheless, based on the high number of mentions in scholarly articles written by researchers and at the same time, the low percentage of self-identified artists reporting they use most of their time working on their art, it is possible that this approach is more frequently used by outsiders to evaluate the level of professionalism among artists, instead of artists themselves.

Furthermore, as Frey and Pommerehne (1989) note, this excludes artists that need another job while striving to be employed by their art, such as actors waiting tables. Similarly, Bain (2005) points out that even though most artists would like to work as artists full-

time, the uncertain nature of the artistic world dictates that they often have a secondary form of employment. She further adds that in her study of Canadian artists, 78 percent of artists were employed somewhere else and worked, on average, 35 hours a week. However, in most cases, secondary occupation was related to their art, as they worked as teachers, assistants or similar. This might bring challenges in identifying oneself in the art community and especially in art education, professional identity is caught between identity as an artist and identity as a teacher (Koff and Mistry, 2012).

2.2.2 Earnings from artistic work

According to Karttunen (1998), income from artistic work is a popular method among the general public and authorities for identifying artists due to its measurable nature and intelligibility – one does not need to have background as an artist to understand the amount of money earned. However, artists themselves do not generally share this view. Karttunen explains that while a majority of the artists observed in her study did report some income from artistic work, less than half noted that the income exceeded expenses from it. She goes on to note that while in many other fields the difference between being legitimate and a twiddler – someone who is not serious about their work – is often related to income, artist's ideology portrays a 'true' artist as being indifferent to money as motive. Furthermore, income might even jeopardize legitimacy in certain fields of art. Among rappers and other urban cultures, commercialisation may be seen as 'selling out', or as exposing the integrity and authenticity of one's art to earn money (McLeod, 1999).

2.2.3 Respect and recognition from peers and reputation among the public

There are several interpretations of the definition of recognition and respect. As Karttunen (1998) points out, they are hard to specify objectively, as opposed to amount of time or earnings, which can be quite easily calculated and compared. She uses grants, prizes, and peer-reviewed exhibitions as concrete examples of recognition and respect. I will next view these in further detail, whilst also taking a closer look at the social nature and different dimensions of respect.

Respect as a social concept

Huo, Binning and Molina (2010) point out that although there is a fairly common understanding about the effects of being respected, there is no unambiguous answer to the definition of respect. However, according to them there is a widespread consensus that on some level, respect reflects the collective assessment of the individual and is somewhat comparable to social reputation. Respect can be defined as an individual's feeling of being wanted, accepted and a part of a group (Ellemers, Doosje and Spears, 2004; Spears, Ellemers and Doosje, 2005). As Bernstein, et al. (2010) remark, being part of a social group is one of the basic human needs, and it plays a vital role in identity formation. This, for one, explains why people in general have a tendency to seek appreciation and respect. Bernstein, et al. (2010) also note that the effects of being included in or excluded from a group can be significant, especially relative to self-esteem. Moreover, as a group always consists of at least two people, it is thus understood that appreciation, or the lack of it, is always created through other people.

Ellemers, et al. (2013) also talk about feelings of inclusion and value that result from perceived respect. By this they refer to the positive evaluations that can be understood and perceived by the target, which in turn results in pride and diminishes feelings of shame. That is, they define respect in two ways. First, respect and appreciation needs to be observable and interpreted in a correct way. Second, respect is understood as positive feedback that wells from actual or imaginary superiority in a certain field.

However, not all positive feedback results in feelings of respect and appreciation, and not all negative feedback results in feelings of neglect. Ellemers, Doosje and Spears (2004) point out that the perceived quality of feedback is also related to its source. The researchers conducted a series of tests that aimed at finding out how the valuation within a group differs from the appreciation from outside the group. They found out that positive feedback within the same group compensated negative feedback from outside the group, whilst positive evaluation from outside could even aggravate the effects of negative feedback derived from inside the group. Furthermore, only feedback from within the group, whether it was positive or negative, affected the individuals' willingness to

transform their own image to match the image of the group. The admiration and respect by certain people may therefore feel irrelevant, undesirable or even shameful, indicating that the experience of appreciation depends not only on the events themselves, but also on their source. In other words, the longing for appreciation is not completely unreserved, but admiration is only needed from people who represent the same values as the individual.

Finally, it can be concluded that the criteria for respect are not static and self-explanatory but instead, it is possible that qualities and attributes that are appreciated in one context may be seen as irrelevant or even negative in another – what is considered desirable here and now may be despised in another culture or at a different time. In his study about respect in the context of leadership, DeLellis (2000) remarks that groups can create their own collective definition of respect through conversation, mutual understanding and experiences. Harkness (2010), on the other hand, notes that qualities that are considered desirable cannot be viewed unchangeable but instead, they bend according to each group and situation, indicating that the criteria for respect and authenticity cannot be unambiguously defined. Finally, Karttunen (1998) points out that respect and reputation are constantly being re-evaluated by others and the current situation and status may change rapidly.

Dimensions of respect

On top of examining the environment in which respect is gained and observed, it is important to consider the dimension and quality of respect. Based on previous literature, Huo, Binning and Molina (2010) list three dimensions that can be used to define perceived respect:

1. Individuals' perceptions of their own worth to the group (perceived status),
2. Individuals' sense of inclusion within the group (perceived liking), and
3. Fair and respectful treatment from peers (treatment quality).

Similarly, as Spears, Ellemers and Doosje point out in their 2005 study, respect has traditionally been viewed as fair, deferential and neutral treatment, or as something that

is based on liking or authority, but it can also result from competence and expertise. In the following section, I will focus on respect as perceived liking and respect as perceived status.

Respect that is based on liking and inclusion is context-bound, relative and subject to other people. As DeLellis (2000) points out, people tend to like those who share their values. For example, a family-oriented person may think highly of stay-at-home-moms, while someone more career-oriented may feel that these people should have used their potential for other things. It is noteworthy that it is not a question of how the person would behave themselves but instead, what is their ideal – thus, they respect someone that holds these qualities. DeLellis (2000) also remarks that this type of respect is highly subjective and therefore no conclusive list of criteria can be drawn. Furthermore, Spears, Ellemers and Doosje (2005) state that while an individual can be very respected within one group, they can be considered unpleasant or even despised in another.

Additionally, respect based on liking is more prone to changes than respect based on skills. This is due to two reasons: first, learning to do something new is rarely an easy task but often requires a lot of practise; and second, it is not subjective in the same sense as liking - it is probable that the members of the group have roughly the same idea of one's ability and competence but may disagree on other things. I will next look into the question of status, competence and skills.

Respect that is based on perceived status can result from either a position or a place in hierarchy (DeLellis, 2000), or from competence and skills which have helped an individual to gain respect among one's peers (Spears, Ellemers and Doosje, 2005; Harkness, 2011). Respect that is based on the prior is relatively static and impersonal – it can be fuelled by sense of duty, fear of punishment or willingness to avoid embarrassment (DeLellis, 2000). It is not a question of skills or personal attributes. For examples, nurses, judges and royals are generally respected in society regardless of their individual character. DeLellis (2000) points out that people in these professions are usually valued due to their rank, even if they happen to also be outstandingly nice people.

However, respect and status can also result from skills that are valued by peers (Spears, Ellemers and Doosje, 2005; Harkness, 2011). As mentioned briefly before, respect based on the ability to do something is often stable and subjective, and as Spears, Ellemers and Doosje (2005) note, incompetence is hard to cover. Furthermore, respect based on skills may even be vital with regards to membership in a certain community. Geoff Harkness (2010, p. 74) cites B-boy Sam in his article,

> *"Being creative, that's what freestyling is. That's how you know when you're credible – when you can freestyle creatively, when you can mix up the beats or you can pull analogies off the top of your head. That's what separates good rapping from bad rapping."*

This can be understood that to be a credible, legitimate member of the community, one needs to be exceptionally talented and willing to further develop this skill. Harkness (2010) also points out that even though a rapper may have all the qualities that might place them on the "real" side of authenticity, they can be deemed "fake" if they lack linguistic skills. Furthermore, Arnold and Bailey (2009) find that in the ballroom community, in order for a child to become a part of a house, they need to prove themselves worthy of being associated with it. This may require walking and winning categories, or reaching a certain "level of professionalism, dedication, and respectability" (p. 183). According to the scholars, this level was set by the house father who required the house members to actively train to become better, as they represented the house everywhere they went and, thus, affected whether or not the house remained respected. It is clear that in both occasions having reached a certain level of professionalism and thus, a certain status is a prerequisite to be a member of the community.

However, there are also some negative considerations. Depending on the community, exceptional talent can even be seen as a threat to the unity of a group. As Spears, Ellemers and Doosje (2005) explain, this may be because skills can also be used for individual gain instead of benefitting the whole community. They point out that the remarkably talented sometimes need to prove their loyalty in order to gain respect. It is interesting that in this case, skills and talent may serve as disadvantage.

2.2.4 Quality of work

While it is easy to understand that the quality of art plays a role in determining one's legitimacy, the concept of quality is still difficult in this context. Karttunen (1998) notes that quality and standard are hard to define as in the world of art, "*to exist is to differ"* (p. 5). Therefore, the quality of art is often measured by peer recognition, acceptance to exhibitions or publications, or concluded from membership in an artist group instead of trying to apply a certain set of standards for evaluation. In relation to dance, Krasnow and Chatfield (2009) point out that while technical facility is easy to measure, it is the qualitative and emotive expression that defines the art form. To help dance judges in assessing the qualitative performance, they listed four competence components: (1) full body involvement, including evaluation of use of stabilized base, and limb energy; (2) body integration and connectedness, including evaluation of central energy, spine articulation, and inter-relationship of body segments; (3) articulation of body segments, including evaluation of lower and upper limb activity; and (4) movement skills, including evaluation of direction changes, balancing, and changes in levels, speeds and dynamics.

Even though these criteria were mainly drawn based on ballet, jazz and modern dance, they can be used for evaluation for other dance styles as well as the criteria do not take a stand on technical components but only on execution and quality of performance.

2.2.5 Membership in a professional artist group

For the purposes of this study, 'a professional artist group' will be viewed as a group within the community (e.g. a crew, a collective or an association), instead of covering the whole community or some regional parts of it.

Even though artists are often striving for unique, individual vision (e.g. Bain, 2005; Chang, 2005; Schloss 2009; Harkness, 2010; Abfalter, 2013), artists often choose to pursue professional status by obtaining memberships in professional organizations (Bain, 2005). According to Bain, such organizations also provide artists with creative atmosphere, a possibility to share technical expertise, and critical feedback to further develop one's skills, to name a few. Furthermore, in the context of urban art, crews are

the foundation of the identity of an artist. As b-boy Santiago from Rock Steady Crew explains,

> *"It's a [collaborative] thing; it's not just one or two. 'I' is hip-hop? No. 'We' is hip-hop."*
>
> (Santiago, in Schloss, 2010, p. 54)

Even though these types of crews stem from the gang fights of New York in the 1960s, they now serve another purpose as well as a display of one's professional legitimacy, as being admitted to a crew requires a display of outstanding skills and ability to follow the rules of the community (Chang, 2005; Isomursu and Tuittu, 2005; Schloss, 2009). Following Bain's (2005) premises on the advantages of artist organizations, Schloss (2009) notes that crew members encourage each other to train and develop their skills and provide a creative environment where members can share artistic inspiration. Furthermore, crews and organizations attend and organize events together to promote visibility and active presence in the art community as a whole. This is associated with artistic legitimacy (Bain, 2005; Chang, 2005, Schloss, 2009).

2.2.6 Professional qualifications and education

According to Butler (2000), professional qualifications can refer to either formal education – such as graduation from an art school – or in some cases, having published work or exhibitions. Koff and Mistry (2012) continue by listing completed degrees or other standardized training as factors that define the legitimacy of a dance teacher but note that they are not necessarily needed. Karttunen (1998) goes even further to point out that the demand for an official qualification may unnecessarily exclude self-taught artists and may not even be applicable in certain fields. For example, in ballet and classical music, having a certain educational background is definitely an advantage, if not a necessity, but in fine arts or pop music that is not the case if the artist is otherwise deemed qualified. Such situations occur in urban culture as well, but interestingly, the members of the community make sure that certain concepts and knowledge are passed on. Schloss (2009) describes the process of teaching a new dancer the basics of b-boying – the

foundation – as a highly personal context where the student becomes a disciple of the teacher, simultaneously developing the dancer's own individual identity in the group. This type of mentorship is common among urban artists such as rappers and graffiti artists, as well as those who otherwise do not have access or means to gain an official degree (Schloss, 2009; Bain, 2005).

However, educational background may also serve as a connective factor among members of the field as it is associated with common practices, shared knowledge and understandings, as well as similar experiences (Evetts 2014). Bain (2005) points out that even though a degree does not determine artistic status nor guarantee success, many artists opt for art school degrees, apprenticeships or private classes. However, not all education is created equal, as she notes that many artists that have completed academic programmes might look down on other forms of education. As one of her interviewees, Nasco, explains, *"[...] she takes classes on Sundays and paints flowers. That is not an artist for me"* (Bain, 2005 p. 33), suggesting that these classes do not hold the same professional value that would increase one's legitimacy as an artist.

2.2.7 Self-identification

While it may seem irrational to use one's own conception as a defining factor, UNESCO's 'Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist' (1980) states that

> *"`Artist' is taken to mean any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art, who considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture and who is or asks to be recognized as an artist, whether or not he is bound by any relations of employment or association."*

Nonetheless, while one must naturally identify oneself as an artist in order to be one, using self-identification as a sole means of defining artistry has been deemed challenging in previous literature. Butler (2000), for one, questions whether self-identification would hold scientific examination as it completely avoids any attempt to create a standard or a definition. Schloss (2009) doubts that someone who has learned some techniques for

commercial use only (instead of becoming an artist in that field) would even want to identify as a b-boy as they would unlikely see themselves as part of that culture, suggesting that other factors are needed for developing an identity of an artist. Furthermore, Bain (2005) suggests that self-identification does not hold the same legitimacy power as the rest of the criteria in itself, particularly if it lacks recognition from peers or other respected colleagues. This is evident in the previous quote about Sunday painting classes: the commentator did not consider the other as legitimate peer. Similarly, Lynn (Bain, 2005; p. 33) explains that

> *"[…] When you've committed your lifeblood, the core of your very being to making art, and somebody casually says that she's an artist, it really wears you down."*

These examples show that despite the importance of self-identification to the individual herself, others may not share the same impression.

2.2.8 Background

Especially in the case of urban cultures, it is necessary to take personal background – such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and socio-economical background – into consideration. For instance, McLeod (1999) notes that descent can determine whether one can pass as a legitimate representative of an art form, and uses hip hop culture as an example. In that context, as the art form has emerged from the struggles of black young men living in ghettos, blackness and masculinity have been considered to be starting points for legitimacy, and as a result, white women would have trouble succeeding as representatives of hip hop. Harkness (2010) continues by proposing that even if certain attributes would be desirable in certain environments, mimicking them will not bring legitimacy but on the contrary, may decrease it. However, in her study about female street dancers, ethnic background and legitimacy, Ghandnoosh (2010) made an interesting observation – while dancers in the early stages of their career considered black dancers to be more legitimate than white dancers, the more advanced dancers did not share this view but instead, valued technique and style over race. Thus, the role of personal background in legitimation seems to differ across studies.

2.3 ballroom and voguing an empirical framework

In this section, I will briefly go through the history of ballroom culture and voguing, and explain some key attributes related to them. The history and terms introduced in this section are central in understanding the topic of this thesis.

2.3.1 Summary of history of ballroom and voguing

As Lawrence (2013) explains, drag balls and voguing can be traced as far as to the 19th century, when Harlem's Hamilton Lodge had its first queer masquerade ball in 1869. This continued all the way into the 1920s when balls were organized once a year. Balls were born as events where same-sex couples and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and queer) people would gather together to dance and showcase their outfits, men often attired in women's clothes and vice versa. However, in the 1930s, New York state legislation started attacking gay men and prohibited "homosexual solicitation", causing the authorities to target balls as well. Contrary to their objectives, ball organizers fought back but were forced to remain underground.

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER ®

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Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Are Stinging Mad

By JERRY LISKER

She sat there with her legs crossed, the lashes of her mascara-coated eyes beating like the wings of a hummingbird. She was angry. She was so upset she hadn't bothered to shave. A day old stubble was beginning to push through the pancake makeup. She was a he. A queen of Christopher Street.

Last weekend the queens had turned commandos and stood bra strap to bra strap against an invasion of the helmeted Tactical Patrol Force. The elite police squad had shut down one of their private gay clubs, the Stonewall Inn at 57 Christopher St., in the heart of a three-block homosexual community in Greenwich Village.

Queen Power reared its bleached blonde head in revolt. New York City experienced its first homosexual riot.

"We may have lost the battle, sweets, but the war is far from over," lisped an unofficial lady-in-waiting from the court of the Queens.

"We've had all we can take from the Gestapo," the spokesman, or spokeswoman, continued. "We're putting our foot down once and for all." The foot wore a spiked heel.

According to reports, the Stonewall Inn, a two-story structure with a sand painted brick and opaque glass facade, was a mecca for the homosexual element of the city's night life. Peopled by exotic trade, drag queens, and their little girls do when they get together.

The thick glass shut out the outside world of the street. Inside, the Stonewall bathed in wild, bright psychedelic lights, while the patrons writhed to the sounds of a juke box on a square dance floor surrounded by booths and tables. The bar did a good business and the waiters, or waitresses, were always kept busy, as they snaked their way around the dancing customers to the booths and tables. For nearly two years, peace and tranquility reigned supreme for the Alice in Wonderland clientele.

The Raid Last Friday

Last Friday the privacy of the Stonewall was invaded by police from the First Division. It was a raid. They had a warrant. After two years, police said they had been informed that liquor was being served on the premises. Since the Stonewall was without a license, the place was being closed. It was the law.

All hell broke loose when the

NEWS photo by Hy Rothman

The Stonewall Inn

Only a handful of police were on hand for the initial landing in the homosexual beachhead. They ushered the patrons out on to Christopher Street, just off

with cheers of encouragement from the gallery.

The whole proceedings took on the aura of a homosexual Academy Awards Night. The Queens pranced out to the street blowing kisses and waving to the crowd. A beauty of a specimen named Stella wailed uncontrollably while being led to the sidewalk in front of the Stonewall by a cop. She later confessed that she didn't protest the manhandling by the officer, it was just that her hair was in curlers and she was afraid her new beau might be in the crowd and spot her. She didn't want him to see her this way, she wept.

Queen Power

The crowd began to get out of hand, eye witnesses said. Then, without warning, Queen Power exploded with all the fury of a gay atomic bomb. Queens, princesses and ladies-in-waiting began hurling anything they could lay their polished, manicured finger nails on. Bobby pins, compacts, curlers, lipstick tubes and other femme fatale missiles were flying in the direction of the cops. The war was on. The lilies of the valley had become carnivorous jungle plants.

Urged on by cries of "C'mon girls, let's go get'em!," the defenders of Stonewall launched an attack. The cops called for reinforcements. Within minutes, a force of 400 blue helmeted police battled the queens, who fought back with their pocketbooks, high heels and fists. Street lights were smashed. Parking meters were uprooted and used as battering rams. Cobblestones flew through the air. Mounted police charged the crowd, trying to force them back. Fire hoses were used to flush the queens from the Stonewall and the surrounding area.

The forces of Queen Power pranced around like Wonder Woman, while several Florence Nightingales administered first aid to the fallen warriors. There were some assorted scratches and bruises, but nothing serious was suffered by these honeys turned Madwomen of Chaillot.

Official reports listed four injured policemen with 13 arrests. The War of the Roses lasted about two hours from about midnight to 2 a.m. There was a return bout Wednesday night.

Two veterans recently recalled the battle and issued a warning to the cops. "If they close up all the gay joints in this area there is going to be all out war."

Bruce and Nan

Both said they were refugees from Indiana and had come to New York where they could live together happily ever after. They were in their early 20's. They preferred to be called by their married names, Bruce and Nan.

"I don't like your paper," Nan lisped matter-of-factly. "It's anti-fag and pro-cop."

"I'll bet you didn't see what they did to the Stonewall. Did the pigs tell you that they smashed everything in sight? Did you ask them why they stole money out of the cash register and then smashed it with a sledge hammer? Did you ask them why it took them two years to discover that the Stonewall

Picture 1 - New York Times article describing a raid in a gay night club displays discrimination against the LGBTQ community. July 6, 1969.

The discrimination continued and by the early 1960s, race started to play a more significant role in ball culture. As Lawrence (2013) describes, many “black queens” – that is, men dressing up as women - were forced to mimic white women in order to win balls. As a countermeasure, they started to host their own events and the glamour hit new heights. These events soon became a "safe haven" especially for black gay men, who continued to dream of the life of a rich, white woman (Bailey, 2013; Lawrence, 2013).

In 1972, the first house was formed after a feud between a white and a black queen. The establishment of houses was also linked to the rising of New York gangs, which formed in the street of Harlem in the 1970s (Chang, 2005; Lawrence, 2013) to combat racism and even more so, claim their own areas and fight each other. These gangs cherished the "macho" ideal of a man, something that black gay men could not identify with. With nowhere else to go, they started to form their own gangs, also known as houses.

While the balls became increasingly popular, they were not dance contests before the 1980s. Instead, queens competed in who wore the best outfit, had the prettiest face, or who looked most like a woman. Voguing as a dance style, one the other hand, evolved from the habit of "throwing shade", or subtly insulting the other. As David DePrino explains in Lawrence's article (2013, p. 5),

> *"Paris Dupree was there and a bunch of these black queens were throwing shade at each other. Paris had a Vogue magazine in her bag, and while she was dancing, she took it out, opened it up to a page where a model was posing and then stopped in that pose on the beat. Then she turned to the next page and stopped in the new pose, again on the beat. Another queen came up […] and it soon caught on at balls."*

Later on, voguing evolved and drew inspiration from other cultures, borrowing moves from Egyptian hieroglyphs and mimicking white, rich models on a runway. Nevertheless, it was not until Madonna released her single "Vogue" in 1990 that voguing became widely known to the public as well. Lawrence (2013) and Ursprung (2012) explain that this was not met with only excitement but instead, Madonna was accused of cultural appropriation as she used voguing for commercial purposes and according to critics, turned the safe

haven of black gay men into entertainment. However, as Ursprung (2012) points out, voguing and ballroom culture also borrow from other cultures and can even be described as being 'obsessed' with white, female celebrities. Therefore, this creates a fascinating paradigm: women are now appropriating black gay men appropriating white, rich women.

As Berkowitz and Belgrave (2010) point out, drag queens are performing gender and sexual transgression as well as white privilege. In their study, many gay people note that the ball is their safe space, and mimicking white, straight women is a way to feel some of that privilege and to have the contextual power to challenge the audience's assumptions of gender and sexuality. It also gives them a feeling of power and admiration that they do not necessarily receive outside balls. Finally, some drag queens share that doing drag is also a way to earn some money (Berkowitz and Belgrave, 2010). Considering that ballroom culture and drag queens are part of the same cultural phenomenon, even though not the same thing, it is plausible to state that these sentiments are applicable to voguing as well (e.g. Lawrence, 2013; Birardi Mazzone and Peressini, 2013).

As Defrantz (2016) remarks, voguing is a social dance, requiring a community of participants. This social nature can be observed from two points of view. First, voguing – like other urban dances – can be discussed as a universal phenomenon where the whole community, culture, hierarchy and special characteristics are evaluated. Second, we can take a look at the smaller communities within the culture, also known as houses, and examine how they work and what defines them. Next, we will look into these concepts in more detail.

Picture 2- Attendees at Banjee Ball surrounded by spectators in California, 2015. The dancers are dancing on a floor in the middle of people instead of a stage in the background, highlighting the social and communal nature of the culture.

2.3.2 Characteristics of vogue and ballroom culture

Ballroom culture

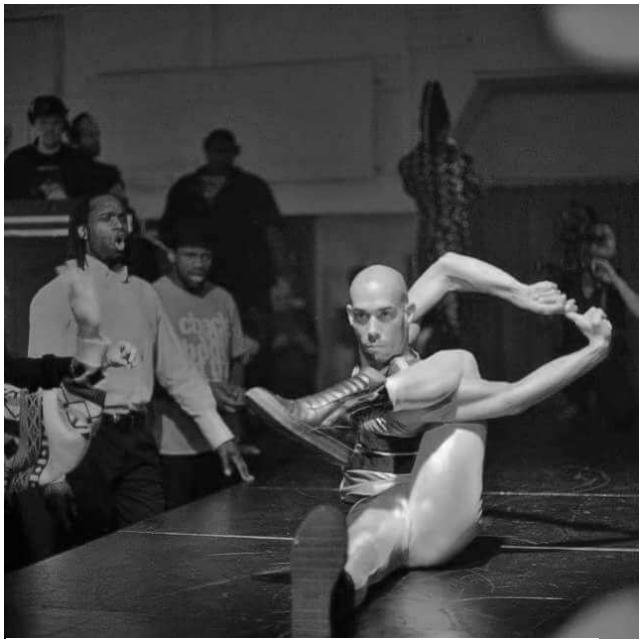
The social practices of ballroom culture comprise of three features that occur simultaneously: the gender system, the kinship structure (houses) and ball events (where the culture's performances are enacted). First, the gender system presents a variety of sexual and gender subjectivities that are not restricted by binary categorization commonly used in society. This system serves as a basis for competitive performance categories and familial roles in houses (Bailey 2014), meaning that categories or roles are not restricted by sex or gender even though, at times, they are linked.

Second, houses in ballroom culture are socially constructed kinship structures with a family-like foundation. These families are led by 'mothers' and 'fathers' who provide guidance and support for their 'children', e.g. house members. According to Arnold and Bailey (2009, p. 174), "house parents recruit and prepare their children to compete in

runway categories that are based on the deployment of performative gender and sexual identities, vogue and theatrical performances, and the effective presentation of fashion and physical attributes". House members compete either individually or as a house in different categories, and simultaneously create an opportunity for celebration, affirmation and critique (Arnold and Bailey, 2009).

Picture 3 - Voguers at the Latex Ball in 2017 presenting for the judges in vogue femme. As typical for Ballroom style, they are competing at the same time.

Finally, when a contestant ‘walks a ball’, they compete in categories that are strictly defined beforehand and the participants are judged by how effectively they carry out the requirements and theme of the category (Arnold and Bailey, 2009). Contestants battle each other either as representatives of their respective houses or as individuals, also known as ‘free agents’ or ‘007s’. In a vogue battle, the ultimate goal is to execute the elements of vogue in a way that makes them stand out from other competitors. The elements and characteristics of different vogue styles are presented next.



Picture 4 - Aviance Yamamoto showcasing flexibility in New way.

As described in Susman (2000), there are three distinct styles of vogue dance. *Old way* is the first style evolved and it is characterized by striking a pose after pose by forming straight, geometric lines, symmetry and grace. In its original form, old way battles ended with one contestant ‘pinning’ the other so that they could not execute any moves anymore. *New way,* on the other hand, emphasizes fast hand motions and swirling arms, spins and elegant substance. It may also involve stretches such as the displacement of double jointed shoulders or splits, as well as acrobatics such as flips. Finally, *vogue femme* is described as expression of extreme femininity, with “flopping wrists, small mincing steps, and *dips*,

a dramatic step wherein a dancer who has one leg lifted high falls backwards to the floor and lands in an arched-back pose" (Susman, 2000: p. 125). This style is characterized by humour and precision.

Having delved into the history and characteristics of ballroom culture, I will next move on to methodology.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will present and justify the methodical choices used in this study. The research approach together with data collection and data analysis methods will be presented. Finally, I will evaluate the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 Research approach: Qualitative and narrative research

This research was conducted as a qualitative and narrative study in order to understand the factors that play a role in defining legitimacy and competence among voguers and voguing teachers. As stated earlier, my goal was to understand how the community defines one's legitimacy, and as this relies on conversations within the community, embodiment of shared meanings and culture, and even tacit knowledge instead of formal education, I decided to use interviews and archival research to grasp a better sense of the problem. Furthermore, using these methods allowed me to observe the topic from multiple points of view – where the culture stems from, how it is perceived and how it is expressed. Eventually, narratives from interviews and archives were analysed using thematic discourse analysis that allowed me to trail social and cultural meanings that are attached to identities, artefacts, events and experiences (Gee, 2005; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Fairclough, 2003). In adhering to the principles of interpretative research (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008), this study does not claim to find definitive answers to the question at hand but instead, aims to provide a deeper understanding of the shared meanings and cultural context of professionalism, respect and initiation. Therefore, as this study is not a general and all-encompassing description of the phenomenon, other interpretations of the data may be just as meaningful.

3.2 Data Collection Method

As Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) explain, empirical data is divided into two categories: primary data (empirical data collected by the researchers themselves) and secondary data (already existing empirical data in textual and visual form). The primary data for this study was collected through nine semi-structured interviews and secondary data from

archival research of video material. Interviews were the main source of data in order to gain access to dancers' personal interpretations of legitimacy and the meanings and feelings they have about the culture and community in general. According to Walsham (1995), interviews are an efficient way to access the interpretations that participants have regarding the actions and events that are taking place. However, as Kvale (2006) points out, interviews can also be an outlet for power differences, which in the case of a fairly sensitive topic, is a threat that needs to be addressed.

Through my interviews, I aimed to gain a better sense of the values and features that a recognised voguer had as opposed to someone who is not viewed as a legitimate representative of the culture. As the topic lies heavily on feelings, impressions and organizational culture, I felt that interviews with open questions were the most effective way to gather reliable empirical data. Finally, archival research was used to give perspective on the culture as a whole and the history behind it, and provide examples of foreign icons and legends that otherwise would not be studied due to a limited timeframe. It is noteworthy that both sources of data are subject to my selection, possibly excluding information that would come up in a different situation and setting.

3.2.1 Interviews

I conducted nine semi-structured individual interviews with members of the community during the course of three months and asked the interviewees about their understanding on authenticity and qualifications in the field. The interviewees were selected based on their previous merits, status in the community and background. Diversity played a key role here, and I strived to find different-aged interviewees with diverse sexual and gender identities as well as ethnic backgrounds, and find dancers and other members of the community who were in different phases in their career. Eight of the nine interviews were held face-to-face, while one was conducted as written conversation over internet due to scheduling challenges. The interviews were approximately one hour long, and, with the exception of two interviews which were held in English, I conducted them in Finnish to allow the interviewees to express themselves as effortlessly as possible. I used a recorder

during interviews which allowed me to make specific notes afterwards. The Finnish interviews were later translated word for word based on the recordings.

To allow for a more specific analysis, the interviewees were divided into three categories based on their experience, status and level of expertise. The interviews have been anonymised and the names or other similar identifying factors will not be published. It is noteworthy that when handling the interview data, neutral pronouns (they, them, their) are used to protect the identity of interviewees. However, some features related to vogue as a cultural phenomenon are listed in the table below.

Level	Male	Female	Gay	Straight	White	POC	House	Pro*
Beginner	2	2	0	2	2	0	0	0
Middle	2	2	1	3	3	1	3	4
Advanced	2	1	2	1	1	2	3	3

*Table 2, summary of interviewees; * identifies as a professional*

3.2.2 Archival research and video material

I analysed the discussions and statements presented in the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1991) to get a better sense of the historical framework of the ballroom culture and voguing. Ballroom culture was first captured in this awarded documentary by Jennie Livingston and it offers a glimpse into the scene in the late 1980s. Despite its critical acclaim, it also received some criticism that it exploited the culture and benefitted from the lives of underprivileged, and that Livingston as a white, genderqueer lesbian woman was guilty of voyerism (e.g. Kubicek, 2013).

I also studied recorded panel discussions recorded by YouTube user awiwicat on legitimacy, voguing culture and respect organized by Finnish voguers in January 2017 as a part of a ball. These panel discussions emerged from a Facebook conversation about legitimacy and cultural appropriation in the voguing community, as people felt the need to define the problem at hand in a more structured way. The panel consisted of four distinguished vogue dancers – Dashaun Wesley, Jamal Milan, Stanley Milan and Marquis Revlon – and I believe that they offer vital insight about the subject, both on why the subject is important and also on what the discussion is all about. Other topics were also addressed at the panel discussions which I chose to exclude from the investigation.

3.3 Data analysis method

This thesis aims to find meanings and connections between statements made in interviews and recorded events. To shed light on the meanings of event and experiences, a thematic discourse analysis was conducted. As such, the outcome of this research is not a definitive set of facts about the world but instead it relies on the interpretations of the interviewees and the community. This, as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) state, is typical in qualitative research.

This study is based on the experiences and views of interviewees as well as videoed statements and discussions, and therefore, a thematic discourse analysis was used to gain a deeper understanding of both data sets. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic discourse analysis is used for pattern-type analysis of data, allowing a detailed, yet complex set of data. By using theoretical – or "top-down", as Braun and Clarke (2006) call it – approach for coding, I was able to look for themes and patterns that answer specific research questions. This approach was chosen to find connections and repeating themes from an otherwise complex data and to identify implicit and explicit ideas.

Based on Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), four criteria define a successful discourse analysis: fruitfulness, quality of interpretation, quality of transcription, and usefulness. They point out that the quality of transcription is particularly relevant as inadequate transcription may change the meanings and nature of interview data. As for the

interviews, to enable as accurate interpretation as possible, word-for-word transcription was necessary. Next, according to the principles of thematic analysis, I generated initial codes based on the data set and combined them into themes that repeatedly were mentioned together, such as house membership or education. At this point, the initial data set was compared to the framework presented in the literature review to assess if something was missing from either one. Within these themes, the data was evaluated first per interviewee and then connected by the level of expertise of the interviewees in order to find patterns that would explain the phenomenon. After that, the themes were further joined under top themes, used as headings in the analysis section, based on mutual links and connections. The headings present the *environment of voguing* ("ballroom as a community"), *who is doing and how* ("dancers as part of the community"), *how they learn to do it* ("education and teachers"), and *how it is done outside the community* ("commercialization"). This later allowed for a detailed analysis based on the framework presented in the literature review as connections between themes and components of legitimacy were analysed in relevant contexts. After carefully going through the material, the answers were anonymised to protect the privacy of interviewees.

Similarly, as for the panel discussions and the documentary, relevant topics covered in the statements were evaluated and then transcribed. Next, the gathered data was coded, divided into themes found while analysing interviews, and analysed according to the same principles and same process as the interviews. Finally, the findings from both interviews and archival research were unified and analysed in relation to the academic literature, and presented either as text or in suitable contexts, as gathering tables.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the study

The trustworthiness of this study was evaluated during the whole process. Qualitative research relies on the assumption that there are multiple, jointly constructed understandings and that the findings of a study are dependent of the interaction between the researcher and participant (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) note that in such constructionist qualitative research, the trustworthiness of the

study should be evaluated based on four principles: dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability.

Dependability refers to the consistency across time, researchers and analysis techniques, meaning that the research process has been logical and documented in a way that others could trace the audit trail (Morrow, 2005). Transferability, in turn, deals with the connection between own research and other research to see, if there is some type of similarity between research contexts (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Credibility is based on internal consistency and the sufficiency of data and familiarity with the topic (Morrow, 2005). Finally, conformability refers to the understanding that findings are never objective but instead, they rely on adequate link between data, findings and interpretations (Morrow, 2005; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). These factors were assessed several times during the research process and necessary measures were taken to comply with them.

Furthermore, the trustworthiness and validity of a study increases with triangulation where the researcher uses multiple sources of data and interprets multiple realities (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Several sources for data and several theories were used, adding to the reliability and validity of this study.

It is noteworthy that the aim of the interviews is not to identify individual opinions but to shed light onto the perceptions and experiences as accurately as possible. As the interviews were conducted confidentially, there were some parts of conversations that could not be published as they included identifiable information. However, those conversations have added my knowledge and affected my understanding of the topic. Therefore, it is possible that they have influenced the interpretations and analysis if the data indirectly.

Furthermore, as the selection of interviewees was, to some extent, based on accessibility and my personal discretion, it is likely that some relevant actors of the ballroom community have been left out. This might skew the results as their opinions and interpretations are not taken into consideration in this thesis.

Having evaluated and explained the methodology and trustworthiness of the study, I will next present the empirical findings gathered from interviews and archival sources.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present the empirical findings of the study. First, the findings from the interviews with members of the community are introduced and analysed. Then, panel discussions about legitimacy and status in the ballroom community are investigated to form a more comprehensive picture especially of the process of gaining status. Finally, video material from a documentary is analysed. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the empirical findings.

4.1 Interviews

I interviewed nine members of the ballroom community to get a deeper understanding of the voguing scene and community in Finland at the moment. In this section, the interviews with members of the voguing community are analysed and the findings are introduced. The interviews are analysed under four subheadings and multiple quotes are used to help in understanding the statements of the interviewees in a comprehensive way. Furthermore, for some topics the level of expertise of the respondent is considered to allow for comparison between beginners, middle-level and advanced members of the ballroom culture.

4.1.1 Voguing and ballroom as concepts

In the beginning of the interviews, the respondents were asked to describe what voguing and ballroom mean to them personally, and what they think is essential to know about voguing. Within the frame of history, the interviewees were unanimous in that it is important to remember the roots and history of the culture. Nevertheless, one middle-leveller noted that even pioneers have different opinions on where a certain thing is coming from, who created it and what something is called. According to them,

> *"[...] it all stems from not having an "official" rulebook or someone writing down the history. The whole culture is like a fusion of things that people used to do back*

then. Like, someone with Latin dance background came in and started do those moves and it just stuck."

Similarly, another middle-level interviewee explained that new information surfaces all the time and therefore, one needs to stay alert. Paradoxically then, it is essential to be familiar with the history and background but at the same time, members of the community admit that this information is open to changes and that even the most experienced members – pioneers – are not in agreement with each other about the history.

Interestingly, respondents that identified as gay or queer did not at first explicitly point out the culture's connection to LGBTQ communities but instead, focused on self-expression and freedom, while the other respondents highlighted the link between the two communities and noted that voguing and ballroom is primarily for LGBTQ people of colour instead of, say, white women. Apart from one, the interviewees – regardless of their level or background – highlighted that voguing is empowerment, a way to handle one's struggles, or an outlet from being in a minority. Four interviewees described their experience as follows.

"In voguing, I can be myself. No one's looking down on me because of how I look like, because of my size or race. Nobody's discriminating against me, I can be whatever I want to be."

"Okay well for me, in the simplest terms, it's empowerment. And back in those days I walked the ball […] and I saw what was going on and I saw the empowerment and, and I could relate to the idea of not being accepted either by society or in your own skin. […] And when you find the people that are like-minded, you find the strength, you find power – especially if you didn't have it before. That's empowerment."

"Well, it's not primarily a place for white women to be gorgeous."

"Voguing evolved to be like a safe haven for [LGBTQ people] that had a hard time in the 1960's. Like, if you needed to be careful of who you are so that you weren't

be beaten to death because of people's prejudice, voguing and ballroom became an outlet for that."

Nevertheless, all respondents felt that it was acceptable to participate in and advance the culture as long as you were giving the space first to the ones who it belongs to. As one dancer phrased, "I like to think of it as 'it is not my house but I'm a nice guest'".

Both beginners described voguing as an intensive hobby and focused more on the *act* of dancing, as can be seen in the comments below, while middle-levellers and advanced respondents emphasized the cultural significance and how voguing had affected their lives.

"The most important thing in voguing is straight lines, you need to be, like, very precise."

"It's all about mimicking supermodels and being fabulous."

In fact, in addition to the beginners, only one middle-leveller referred to voguing as a dance style and profession, despite all the middle-level and advanced interviewees talking about it as their occupation at some point later in the interview. Moreover, all three advanced-level respondents pointed out that voguing is part of ballroom and it is not just dance but culture, and one respondent mentioned that not all voguers consider themselves to be dancers at all.

"It's not just the voguing community – it is ballroom – voguing is a ***part*** *of ballroom."*

"Well, it is not created by Madonna, and it is not a dance style but a culture."

Many respondents also pointed out that there are plenty of other areas of expertise within voguing and ballroom, including DJs, fashion designers, event organizers, photographers and so on. Moreover, not all contestants dance but some categories are focused on physical appearance, face structure, or outfit, to name a few.

As is characteristic to urban dance styles in general, the community spirit and social nature of voguing and ballroom cropped up in all conversations. Respondents described voguing as 'a community' and 'second family', suggesting that the ballroom culture is more than just a group of people that are involved in the same type of art. However, the affinity was described to be more powerful than in other street dance styles. As two middle-level interviewees described,

> *"Ballroom culture is so different from other urban cultures, it's unique and specific. Usually the people battling in hip hop or house or locking are the same people [in every category] and it's the same concept. And you go there by yourself, or with a partner or you have your crew and you see who's the toughest. But in voguing, the whole culture is based on people being outcasts who were forced to have their own events hidden from the rest of the world so they're all in it together. Yeah, you represent, you got the families, the houses, but it's more like 'this is my family, my people'. It goes far beyond than just dancing."*

> *"And you know, I had been dancing for a long time and I'd been in different groups and crews but I never had the same kind of sense of solidarity and inclusion. I just got lost in it."*

Next, the respondents were asked to describe the voguing scene in Finland. According to the respondents, it is very different from what it is in New York, mainly because there has not been time or need for a similar development. As one interviewee described, if dancers in Finland would have waited for the community to grow organically, it would not have happened, so it had to be done through commercial dance classes. Similarly, contrary to the history in New York, the LGBTQ community in Finland found voguing only after it had been established as a dance. As a result, voguing in Finland is often first approached as a dance style and then, after a while, as a culture. This starting point divided the respondents and while some of them accepted this as a necessity, others considered it to be regrettable.

"I don't want to feel guilty about how it all happened, I don't think that there would be voguing culture in Finland if it wasn't for this development."

"The problem is that [voguing] was commercialized here when it should have been an underground culture and let it grow from there. And now, the commercialization has kind of stuck and it is more difficult to find the core of the culture anymore."

"I'm not sure if LGBTQ people in Finland think that they are part of this culture."

Two interviewees also pointed out that first focusing on voguing as a dance was partly an intentional decision: when voguing started to spread out to Europe and Finland, the objective was to get rid of some of the problems – fights, drama, and violence – that were prominent in New York. However, this approach has not eliminated schism from the community all together, and in spite of the efforts to create a more peaceful ballroom community, there is some dispute over certain matters such as history and legitimacy, or over individual chemistries. Finally, according to most of the respondents, the community in Finland is relatively small and the number of active members is low while one middle-leveller saw potential.

"It's very unfortunate if people fight…We're already a super small community."

"There's so few of us, especially those who are actively involved, organizing events, having classes… there's only a couple of active dudes."

"There was a time when the community was not that active and it took [the members] a while to realize that something needs to be done or the whole thing may just fade away. But right now, it is quite stable."

"I see it as a growing community, like people are really interested in [voguing]."

The answers reflect a wish for a more active and lively community and – as all respondents are active members of the community – possibly a desire for more people taking responsibility. Furthermore, they suggest that there is a fear the community will cease to exist due to lack of voguers or as a result of disagreements.

4.1.2 Dancers as part of the community

Next, the interviewees were asked to narrate how a new dancer interested in voguing usually gets started. Furthermore, they were asked to describe a vogue dancer and specify what characteristics define a good dancer. Finally, we spoke about houses, their organizational structure and membership.

According to the respondents, the initiation to the community usually happens gradually through existing members of the ballroom scene. Many interviewees reported that they themselves, along with many of their friends, wanted to explore voguing and ballroom in particular, not just any dance.

> *"The masses come because they heard about it on the bush telegraph: one person tries it and then they bring everyone else with them as well."*
>
> *"[I got introduced to it] first by getting to know my teacher, she introduced me to other voguing members."*
>
> *"Balls, a lot of people come through them nowadays. And not just dancers, because of balls, people have become interested in other categories as well and it has just spread around."*
>
> *"So we would meet every week, we wouldn't even know each other's name – real name, you know – or what you do for a living but we knew that we're going to be here. So that's how I got introduced to the scene and it was totally by accident."*

In these cases, the initial introduction had happened somewhere else: they may have seen voguers in a ball or behind an artist, or watched videos online and grew interested based on them. Similarly, six respondents said that they themselves followed friends to classes and balls without really knowing what voguing was about.

Some people who have backgrounds as dancers are looking for something new to try. As one middle-lever interviewee, who works as a teacher, explained

"Well I teach at [dance school] and usually they just want to try something new. And after a while they might get excited about it, possibly for the same reasons as I did."

This comment implies that most of their new students first become interested in the dance style and after a while, they may grow attracted to the culture. Even if the introduction to voguing happened in dance schools, new students do not necessarily participate in balls, and hence, ballroom culture, without their teacher or other students encouraging them to do so. This is also how both beginners got involved in the community: after getting to know their teacher, they attended balls as spectators and after learning the basics, as competitors.

Next, the interviewees were asked about how they would describe a vogue dancer, and what separates a good dancer from a bad one. For a start, the respondents were able to identify an extensive list of desirable attributes. Down the line, staying true to the roots of the culture and respecting its history was mentioned in all conversations right from the beginning and it was evidently considered to be the most important thing to keep in mind, a sort of a starting point. One advanced respondent explained that

"In order to know where you're going you got to know where you been. Or at least know what came before you. But a lot of kids aren't even concerned with."

This view is not surprising considering that culture and historical background were also highlighted when describing the essentials of voguing and ballroom culture.

Furthermore, time spent in the ballroom scene was mentioned regularly and on all levels of expertise. This was often connected to active participation in the action of the community. For example, both beginners described voguing as an intensive hobby. One of them described,

"In my opinion, a vogue dancer walks or has walked at some point. They may also influence the community by organizing workshops or balls, attending them as

contestants or in the audience. And of course, by training either at classes or independently."

In other words, in order to be legitimate and respected, one needs to actively attend events as well as training sessions and workshops, but also work for the community in other ways, such as organizing events and participating in the discussion. Both beginner interviewees stated that "as a voguer, you are part of a community". This statement can also be interpreted as "if you are a legitimate voguer, you are part of a community" or even further as "legitimate voguers are part of the community".

Middle-level interviewees shared these views and stressed that time spent in the ballroom brings visibility and thus, plays a role in determining one's status. However, one respondent remarked that time spent is not a valid indicator without specific criteria. They pointed out that, for example, people training in dance schools may use multiple hours a week practicing for a spring show but they would still not be considered legitimate. In fact, this kind of training may even be harmful to the culture as one interviewee explained.

"You lose the core, the heart of the culture and the dance when people only focus on that one choreography versus practicing freestyle and maybe even attending a ball at the end of the spring."

Advanced-level respondents seemed to share this view as they emphasized time spent in the ballroom. One advanced-level respondent even noted that

"choreography is] one thing but teaching people how to teach how to dance is another […] Choreography is a skill but it's not dance",

implying that time spent in choreography is futile in terms of legitimacy in the voguing community. Interestingly, both beginners spoke about choreographies and formations as almost equivalent to other forms of training, highlighting the different views on the validity of use of time.

"Creating new things by myself feels difficult."

"When you look at the [choreographed] formations at nationals, you can tell that the culture is alive and well."

These differences may be due to a shorter amount of time spent voguing – as choreography is doing certain movements in a particular order, it may help in finding patterns of movement, and thus, support beginners in creating continuous movement when improvising.

As for how to recognize a good dancer, all interviewees except one described confidence or attitude – also referred to as 'owning the place' – as the primary criteria for a remarkable dancer. According to one middle-leveller,

"It's the feeling that is everything, we always talk about this. [An icon] is always saying that it is 90 per cent of the thing that you need to be confident, know how to perform, own the place. Technique comes second, always."

Similarly, one advanced-level respondent noted that

"You must be a participant in the ballroom scene and be exceptional – walking and winning. Someone who truly goes out on the floor and gives you a great show – just walking with no feeling or style is just someone who has learned the techniques but not the feeling."

Following the theme of comments above, technique and cleanliness of movement alone were not considered to make someone a good dancer. One interviewee even addressed to this as follows.

"The dancers in Russia, they do not know about the culture, they only know the moves and are flexible"

The comment above suggests that knowledge and attitude are considered as more significant factors than technique when deciding on who is a legitimate voguer. Another interviewee described a situation in a ball in Helsinki where a dancer got 'tens across the board' (e.g. got chosen to battle) even though their lines were not precise and they were lacking flexibility. However, they showed confidence, their costume followed the theme

well, and they were aware of the social norms in a ball, supporting the statements of the interviewees.

Based on conversations with the respondents, quality of movement consists of two components – technique and precision – that cannot be separated from each other. As already covered earlier, there are three distinct styles in voguing – old way, new way and vogue fem – and the required elements vary depending on the style. Similarly, mastering technique may show differently depending on the style in question, but common threads across styles were sharp and clean lines, controlled and precise movement, flexibility, variation in the use of force, and overall execution. Interestingly – unlike in many other dance styles, such as jazz, ballet or modern dance – pirouettes, jumps and other traditionally required technical elements were not listed, distinguishing voguing from dance styles taught in academies. Furthermore, even though technique was mentioned many times during the interviews, none of the respondents considered it to be the most important asset of a good vogue dancer.

Although similar themes recurred in most of the answers, there were some interesting differences between levels. For instance, beginners mentioned technique multiple times as a concept but were somewhat unable to specify a list of desirable attributes. One interviewee highlighted sharp and clean lines especially in the new way category and mentioned posing as part of performance, while the other one spoke about mastering the basics before entering a ball but did not define what basics includes. The first respondent even described the differences between members and non-members of the community as follows.

> *"It depends on the spectator… Someone who is not a dancer may not understand how difficult it is to get those straight lines and instead just focus on the outfit and facial expressions. "*

The above statement suggests that they value technique over appearance and suppose that other members of the ballroom community do that as well. Furthermore, it shows appreciation for clean technique and indicates that they find that difficult to master.

Middle-level respondents, on the other hand, were much more willing and able to pinpoint certain technical elements that they considered to be important. These included sharp lines and geometry-like, controlled movement, straight knees, and outstanding flexibility. Out of all the respondents, they – apart from one – were the only ones who brought out their background as professional dancers as a factor that affects their judgment on other dancers' performance. As one dancer explained,

> *"It is distracting to watch someone who has only been dancing at the clubs and has no professional training, with bent knees and slobby movement"*.

Nevertheless, they too were insistent that technical competence alone was not enough to make someone a good voguer.

Interestingly, advanced interviewees mentioned technique or precision as factors that promote legitimacy far fewer times than other respondents. While one interviewee did point out that if you are not familiar with the specific technique related to voguing it does not look or feel right, this was more often covered as a starting point.

> *"If you know the technique, you can go beyond it and break the rules. You know, when you're good enough, you can use it to control the situation by taking advantage of technique to take over the battle"*.

Furthermore, one icon failed to mention technique or elements related to that even once during the interview, suggesting that either they considered it to be such an obvious necessity that it does not need to be mentioned, or that they did not see it as relevant at all. Instead, they highlighted creativity and originality. When talking about trying to appeal to judges and asking them what they are looking for, they noted that they refuse to give answers.

> *"If I tell people 'I like to see you throw your hands in the air and then throw them down', everybody comes doing that and then it's like, why would I give you the answers. It's like taking a test and I would give you the notes. Like, why would I do that?"*

Their answer suggests that they are more interested in what that person can create on their own than doing some certain set of moves or techniques. Another interviewee pointed out that they focus on musicality and the ability to spot certain sounds and beats when evaluating dancers.

Differences that occur along the trajectory are surprisingly systematic and coherent within given levels of expertise. The development from technicality to performance may stem from attainability: according to the advanced members, technique is a starting point, a base for everything else, and most likely, that is the stage that beginners are still struggling with so they pay more attention to it. Contrastingly, by this point advanced-level dancers have become accustomed to it so they use other evaluation criteria for distinguishing exceptional talent.

When asked about the distinguishing features of a bad dancer, all interviewees but one listed 'being in a wrong category' as a reason for not making it to the next round. Based on the interviews, a legitimate member of the culture would know the meanings and definitions of different categories, and therefore, would be able to follow them. This was described to happen in balls regularly as either the techniques characteristic to that category were not correct or, especially in the non-dance categories, the attire did not match the description, even though they might have looked nice. One middle-leveller explained it as below.

> *"Beginners are often in a wrong category. Immaturity shows in that people do not understand the category and start mixing techniques, or enter face category and start walking runway. There's a lot of unwritten rules that are hard to understand if you do not have the experience."*

Other reasons include sloppy movement, mixing techniques and foundations from other categories, and as this interviewee mentioned, spicing dance with techniques from other dances. Ironically, then, flawless technique is not necessarily a requirement for a good dancer nor can it be considered as a sole criteria of assessment, but impure technique can

result in a chop. Furthermore, it seems that the lines between individuality and creativity and not staying within the right category are very fine and create a dilemma for dancers.

Titles and status

In the interviews, we also discussed hierarchies inside the community. All but one respondent admitted that it is peculiar to voguing to raise people based on their merits and previous actions. Four titles were mentioned in the discussions – a star, a statement, a legend, and an icon. These titles are deemed in sequence so that, for example, to be deemed a statement, one already needs to be a star. One advanced-level interviewee in particular contributed to the topic by providing an extensive list of criteria that are used to evaluate one's status or title. Next, these criteria are presented and discussed.

A *star* is someone new who has been active for about two or three years and is exciting to see – they have the scene excited to watch what they will do next. They are a crowd pleaser described to be imaginative, quick thinking, innovative and are developing their own, distinctive style. A *statement,* on the other hand, has been active for three to six years, has passed all the 'star' criteria and is winning multiple balls. They have also battled legends and as the interviewee described it,

"They are known for dominating their category – it is an event when they walk."

According to the respondent, statements are already known for their distinctive style and they have received 'Of the Year's' for their category, meaning they have been selected as best of the best. At the next level, a *legend* is someone who personifies a category – a sort of an epitome of their category. They have travelled in different regions, are well known throughout the ballroom community and have been selected 'Of the Year's' multiple times. Finally, an *icon* is someone who has been through all the stages and is closing in on fifteen to twenty years in ballroom. They have impacted the scene in such a way that they have changed it or their category – they have become the very definition of what their category is. According to the respondent, these are the most copied and inspiring people with a legacy to match. Before being deemed iconic, they have thrown functions, run a house, and achieved several awards or titles. Moreover, they have done

work outside the scene for and with the community and made an impact. The interviewee explains the scope of this.

> *"That is the overall key to this – what have they contributed to the scene – are they a standout – can you say their name and all of ballroom knows who you're speaking of? This is impact."*

As for how the titles are decided, the interviewee described a rather organised system for decision-making.

> *"The people that pick or deem who the stars, statements and legends usually get together at annual Awards Balls and name who has gained status. The people that award these people are legends and icons in the ballroom scene who've kept track of the performers' progress throughout the years – which is very important to document what you won, where you won it, and when. "*

They also pointed out that the wins must come from major functions and balls but exceptions to this rule are announced in advance. The comment shows that not all balls are comparable against each other and that for it to count a legitimating event, it needs to pass certain criteria, emphasizing the methodicalness of the process.

In the beginning of each ball, the LSS – legends, statements and stars – who are present are introduced to the audience. As one middle-level interviewee explained, it is important to let people know who is present as for one, it salutes the most accomplished members of the community, and second, having respected members of the community there brings legitimacy to the event. However, presenting LSS in a ball is not always limited to title-holders. As two respondents note, it is dependent on the host of the ball, as they may decide to call other people as well even if they are not yet deemed to show them support, and thus demonstrate that they are respected regardless of their title.

Finally, we discussed aspiring for a certain status. One respondent emphasized that titles are not handed out easily or on light grounds.

"You must learn the category, have your own style and make it your own, walk, win, and have time in the ballroom. Status is not automatic and not for the average – you must go above and beyond to be noticed. Of course the system has its flaws but for the most part they get around to acknowledging and recognizing those that deserve it. "

The above quote implies that deeming someone is rarely a surprise but instead, it has been lying ahead for a while. It also shows that nominations are justified and that it is neither acceptable to question them nor aim for them. Furthermore, one interviewee mentioned that there have been cases where someone starts to call themselves legendary without grounds and that in such cases, it is difficult to distinguish whether they meant it as an adjective or as a title. However, they also reckoned that people who want to call themselves legendary have also been involved in the community long enough to know the meaning and weight of the term in this context, suggesting that they were trying to claim a status without grounds. Another advanced-level respondent reflected on waiting to be deemed.

"When people use these words – say a legend, a pioneer – those are terms that are deemed by other people. I personally think that if a person calls themselves that, there is an issue. Because you're claiming something when in all reality what you produce should give you that overall title."

Houses

When discussing houses, it is first worth noting that all interviewees considered themselves to be members of the ballroom community in one way or another: as dancers, event organizers, photographers, DJs, fashion designers, and so on. Furthermore, all advanced-level and three out of four middle-level respondents were house members while one middle-level respondent and both beginners were not. This showed in their responses, as non-house members were generally quite hesitant to talk about matters related to houses facts and pointed out that what they are telling is not their personal experience but instead, things that they have observed and learned. This may be due to a willingness to

spread accurate information and because, as non-house members, they have no personal experience – everything they know about houses is second-hand information.

In relation to training, a majority of the dancers remarked that they train with others in a group, either at previously arranged time or spontaneously, and only one respondent said that they prefer training alone but attend collective training sessions occasionally.

> *"I usually train at Kisis with other dancers. Training alone is quite dull. "*
>
> *"Amm, quite a lot by myself, we have [a group] and we train a lot of different things. And of course, workshops – if someone comes to Finland from abroad, I definitely try to be there."*

In a way, the community and houses provide its members a setting for development as dancers and create a positive pressure for regular practice as it combines sociality with obligatory repetitions, making practice more fun and thus, increasing motivation. In relation to houses, both beginner-level interviewees mentioned that house members support and push each other to do better in both practice and balls by providing feedback and cheering on each other at balls. According to one interviewee, houses have their own chants that they use in balls, promoting team spirit and tying members more tightly to their house. However, it is possible that some actions towards a more united community may in fact be interpreted as excluding. For example, one interviewee mentioned a WhatsApp group where dancers who attend to balls arrange training sessions. While this definitely creates a sense of belonging to those involved, it may make it more difficult for new prospects to join the community as they are not able to take part in the discussion.

Houses were described to have a family-like structure with mothers, fathers and children along with other roles that depend on the house. One interviewee highlighted the importance of early houses to their members as a 'second family' that replaced their initial family that had dismissed them due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.

> *"Now basically houses, think of them as crews, family oriented crews. […] You know, some of us didn't have parents that were involved in your lifetime so they*

couldn't give you any guidance. That's where houses come in. Sometimes because they become your extended family. "

Furthermore, houses have an explicit hierarchy, a sort of an organizational structure that mimics a family structure. According to the interviewees, houses are run by mothers and fathers, followed by other members in different types of positions – emperor, princess, aunt and so on – that help the parents in running the house. House members are accountable to their parents and in proportion, parents are responsible for their children. As three respondents described,

"Yeah there is a sort of hierarchy, it was really surprising to me that it is really like that. There is a father and a mother in a house, and I guess [house member] is going to be the next mother, so it is a certain type of career path and there are all these leaders. We also have an overall father and this other one who – in the last resort – close everything. Houses have chapters in different countries and they are run by these, sort of like local chiefs. It is quite structured compared to, for example break crews which, well, have some leaders and then just the rest of them."

"That's basically how the hierarchy works, we answer to the parents of our house. For me, [house parent] is the one and I do think that [they] have earned the title. So, amm, we answer to [them] about everything, if we're going to walk somewhere we need to let [them] know and so on. "

"Well it's not really like that in Finland but in some other countries, the parents take care that their children have their clothes with them and have remembered to eat. So, it's really like parenting."

Moreover, as for disputes and problems within a house, three interviewees admitted that just like in a family, naturally there are situations where children disagree with their mother or other parental figures but still, they respect her due to her position.

"You know it's like in your own family. Everybody's got a crazy uncle or a crazy aunt and you're like 'okay, I'm going to give you respect but stay over there'."

"It would have to be something huge, like a major mistake for a house mother or a chapter mother to be turfed out of their job. But that's how it goes with bosses, no matter what they do."

"I guess there have been riots somewhere but it is not like that in Finland. Usually the mother is the founder of the house so it would be, like, extremely disrespectful trying to replace them. It is more common to go on to start their own house."

From the above quotes, it can be concluded that house members understand the hierarchy of houses and view it as fixed, almost rigid – the rank inside a house is rarely challenged. However, they even seemed to support this type of power structure, as the interviewees showed strong respect for their house parents and did not question their obligation to report on their activities but instead, spoke about it as a self-evident truth. Furthermore, these expressions speak for the assumption that as questioning a status is considered to be a breach of rules, the titles within a house are perceived as somewhat eternal and are not subject to change based on later actions.

Many of the answers about house membership did not arise from questions related to houses but from examples they gave about status or the community as a whole. Two middle-level house members reflected on the criteria for membership as follows.

"There had been a lot of talk about it [being invited to a house] before. Over the years, I had gotten to know the pioneers and they liked what I was doing. So that's how I got invited."

"I got invited after I started training with the house father and he saw the potential in me.

Moreover, two respondents noted that

"[House mother] invited [house member] to the house, they were really close and [house member] had advanced a lot as a dancer. You can be in a house even if you weren't a good dancer as long as someone sees that potential. The inviter takes full responsibility of the new member and supports their development."

"I'm not a member of any house. I'm always very critical of what I do, I don't want to go and do something I'm not good at – I wait until I know what I'm doing. So, I guess I didn't have the courage to walk in a ball."

These answers indicate that the interviewees consider developmental potential and training closely with existing members – especially leading figures of the houses – over exceptional talent as common criteria for house membership. In other words, someone higher in the hierarchy – in most cases, a house mother – has seen something special in that particular dancer and is ready to take responsibility for their development – a sort of an apprenticeship.

Furthermore, the last two answers highlight an interesting paradox. While the first one remarks that it is possible for poor dancers to be house members if someone sees their potential, the second one assesses that although they possess the qualities of a good dancer (by their own judgement), they have not been invited because they didn't attend balls, e.g. they did not actively participate in the actions of the community, and hence, no-one was able to see their possible potential. It can also be interpreted that they consider it a possibility that their desire to 'master the art' cost them a house membership.

Two house parents describe what catches their attention when considering new house members as below.

"It's about who are willing to invest in voguing and go to balls and are clearly interested… Those who beg to get invited are not interesting at all, it's more about motivation and results – and not even prizes but development and the right mind set."

"If you see what they do on their own, you see their passion, you see that drive. You know, I always question when someone says, 'I want to be a [house member]' because that's wrong motivation. You can have a goal but when you say, 'I want to be so and so', you're trying to gear yourself for that approval to be a part of that thing. Me, I'm not concerned with that, I'm concerned with the individual - what do

you do on your own? What is your passion on your own? How do you do things for yourself? Then you get invited to it."

It is noteworthy that neither one of them even mentions talent, a specific set of skills nor other accomplishments as criteria. Additionally, they both highlight that they consider *wanting* to be a member as wrong kind of motivation - a kind of a turnoff - and instead, they are interested in motivation for personal development and courage to express oneself. When we reflect these statements against the previous ones concerning criteria for membership, it is plausible to suggest that 'not having the courage to walk' is based on, not the idea that one is not good enough, but on the belief that one is not good enough *in the eyes of others,* thus being afraid of performing.

The answers also indicate that new members are seen as an asset that brings value to the house. Using potential, individuality and inner passion as criteria for membership creates a presumption that new members will bring something special on the floor when walking as that is the reason they have been invited to the house.

However, the views on meeting the criteria differed, as can be seen in the responses by two interviewees.

"Nope! Everyone [in a house] have a reason to be house members."

"Sometimes people get invited and it is hard to understand why. Maybe I just have not seen them enough or seen only the bad days, I don't know."

While the first respondent did not question the legitimacy of house members in any way, the second respondent admitted that the criteria was not clear to them in all cases. However, the later comment implies that they are more inclined to question their own experience and ideas instead of challenging the ground for invitation, suggesting that even though they do not know the specific reasons for membership, they trust that the process has been justified.

Finally, house membership as a legitimating factor divided the interviewees. Two house members weight on the consequences of representing a house.

"Along with the membership comes a certain type of presumption that I know what I'm doing, it gives me legitimacy."

"Of course we try to hold on to a good image and you know, as we are an internationally known vogue house and it is generally known that we do not invite whoever. The process is quite thought through."

Both answers indicate that house membership can be viewed as a guarantee of quality and validity. Especially the remark on the strictness of the invitation process suggests that the members are extraordinary – they have passed a certain type of quality control and thus, they meet demands.

However, two non-house members reflect on the importance of membership to being respected.

"Well, if we think about hierarchy… I think of it, like, if someone has taught me things, then they are above me. But I'm not a member of a house so I don't really see that as a status symbol of sorts."

"Being accepted to a house may bring respect but it has no intrinsic value per se. A bad dancer who's in a house is not more respected than a good dancer that's not in a house and vice versa."

These somewhat contradicting views imply that while house members connect membership with validity, legitimacy and responsibility over right representation, non-house members do not view these as exclusive traits characteristic to only houses. Similarly, as they consider themselves to be members of the ballroom community but not house members, they may be more inclined to view other criteria more relevant to legitimacy than houses.

Finally, one interviewee repeatedly referred to house members by their house name – Ninja, Yamamoto and so on – instead of their birth names, and used house names as a sign of certain status, highlighting the importance of membership in a house and, possibly

subconsciously, treating them primarily as representatives of their house instead of individual dancers.

4.1.3 Education and teachers

Next, we discussed education in general and the qualifications of a teacher. Furthermore, the interviewees were asked to list attributes that they consider valid for a teacher and evaluate the legitimacy of vogue teachers within and outside the community. First, the interviewees' views on training and different forms of learning are introduced. Then, the qualifications of teachers are presented later in this section.

Regarding education, the respondents pointed out that there is no official degree or a syllabus for training to become a vogue dancer. As one middle-level interviewee stated,

> *"When I think about like, if I had [a dancer] who has done nothing at all, and one who has done all the things – well, of course that would play a role [in creating legitimacy]. A lot. But as there is no official educational system, it is hard to tell how many 'things' is enough."*

The answer also illustrates the difficulty of evaluating the required level of know-how without universal, measurable criteria. On the other hand, an advanced-level respondent described the challenges of the whole concept of dance classes in urban culture.

> *"In urban culture having dance classes, let me explain. It's, it's almost an oxymoron to have urban dance being taught in a classroom because urban dance was born in the urban setting. It was born in clubs, it's club culture."*

It is noteworthy that the respondent is not saying that voguing, or other urban dances, should not be taught in classrooms but instead, cannot be taught entirely, as if the full nature of urban dances could not be grabbed in a classroom – according to them, it is next to impossible. Still, it seems that the interviewees shared the idea that some type of education is necessary, and hence, education of some sort was brought up by all respondents at some point during the interviews.

The interviewees reflected on different learning methods. First, two of them mentioned self-study, mostly based on materials found online.

> *"I really should try to find out more about [the merits of icons] online."*

> *"It's so easy to follow someone on Instagram or YouTube, I at least try to follow those who have an impact in New York or Paris or Russia, to see what they have learned and what type of things they do."*

Furthermore, the significance of role models came up. Three interviewees from different levels of expertise explained this method.

> *"I saw him dancing and I knew that that's what I wanted to do. I realized that there are no limitations, I can develop myself forever."*

> *"House members train together before balls. […] The inviter takes full responsibility of the new member and supports their development."*

> *"If you and I are in the same room and we danced for a sometime, there's something that is influenced by you and something that is influenced by me. If a new person comes into that room and these people who dance for a while and they see something that connects us all together but they can't figure out what it is, and that's the style. That's what it is. You know. "*

Finally, the respondents brought up dance classes and workshops. Four respondents describe the nature and significance of dance classes.

> *"There has been a lot of discussion that if you only take classes with the American gurus, you would get the real ABC from there. And not all Finnish teachers have either taken it or they have not really taken it in as they do not really know how to explain it [voguing], where it is coming from and how it has developed."*

> *"I like that class, there is no choreography but only steps, feedback, history and preparation for balls."*

"Knowledge on history and culture and learning about ballroom and what the different terms mean. It would be nice to try how it feels to walk in a real ball and get feedback already at classes."

"I always tell people to take Virpi's classes in the beginning. She has the patience to explain and she can really, like, go through it bit by bit, teach the right things correctly, explain history, and go over and over the basics of voguing so that it's easy for a beginner. I'd say they are definitely the best place to start voguing in Finland."

Based on the answers, three means for education could be distinguished: first, (dance) classes and workshops given by someone higher in the hierarchy; second, apprenticeship; and third, self-study using for example videos, interviews, articles, and social media. Moreover, different learning methods serve different purposes. Most interviewees referred to self-study as a way to acquaint themselves with *history* and *basic terminology* as well staying up to date of current conversation, while apprenticeship was mainly used for *technique, style* and *understanding the culture*. Finally, the respondents viewed dance classes and workshops as places where all four components could be taught. It is noteworthy that college or university graduates in dance were neither not mentioned at all or were viewed as less legitimate in terms of voguing.

When asked about the qualifications and most important features of a teacher, the opinions varied. Four respondents discussed the difficulty of defining who is qualified to teach.

"It is a conflicting topic with a lot of extreme and opposite point of views."

"It is kind of hard to define, there's a lot of discussion about this amongst dance teachers. It is a really extensive question and there are no explicit answers when you can't really say that 'once you know all of this trivia, you're qualified'."

"If we think about it like I used to – that you can teach only after you know everything – well, there would be no teachers. But after you get past that… Like

waiters, they can go to school for three years or they can work for three years and be just as qualified. So I guess it is just about doing it for some time."

"It is a difficult question and we discuss about it a lot, in relation to other dance styles as well. I, for example, was way too young to teach when I started but I did not know it back then."

The answers highlight the importance of the topic within the community as the interviewees pointed out that there is regular discussion over the qualifications of teachers. They also imply that as there are no commonly defined criteria for teachers, but that the topic divides the community. However, when asked to list some attributes more specifically, a few themes were repeated. First, the interviewees shared the view that a legitimate teacher should be a member of the community.

"You can't teach club culture if you ain't never been to the club. "

"Are you involved enough [in the community]? If you think you are and you may have even won a ball or too, then you need to remember that teaching is a big responsibility. How you speak about minorities and how you handle those things, it is something to think about."

"It is important to be a super active member of the community, you need to know where it all comes from, what it means, what the starting point is. You know the categories and you are able to explain them to someone who has no idea what voguing is. You have participated in competitions, you have been active and if you have some merits, all the better. "

"Nevertheless, in voguing – just like other urban dances – as it stems from social contexts and it is not just about technical skills and movement, the minimum requirement should be some type of involvement in the culture and the scene. "

"If I, as a teacher, would not participate and be involved in the scene and the culture, it's like. What am I even doing here?"

Active involvement and membership in the community was definitely considered to be the most important quality of a teacher, regardless of the level of the respondent's expertise. The interviewees clearly consider it to be a prerequisite for teaching instead of just a desired trait. Interestingly though, none of the interviewees mentioned houses or membership in a house. However, the question of merits came up in some conversations. Two respondents stated that

> *"My opinion is that a teacher should walk or have walked, and won the category they teach at least once. "*
>
> *"Well yeah, the prizes determine quite well if are you qualified or not. "*

On the other hand, four middle-level interviewees were more cautious in their demands for a teacher.

> *"For example, a friend of mine. They never win but they always participate, are present, taking photos, teaching. They have the most fabulous students but I guess that they do not shine where they should in order to win. But their students are really successful so how do you compare that?"*
>
> *"Winning a competition should not be a prerequisite. Benny Ninja himself has said that they have lost many times – it just didn't feel right that time. And there's always another ball."*
>
> *"I'd like to think that it is a different thing to be a good dancer than to be a good teacher. There are people who have the ability to understand and dismount the concepts so that they can be taught but they are not the most successful dancers. "*
>
> *"Of course [winning] is another merit but there are these drop dead gorgeous dancers who suck at teaching so these things don't always correlate. But of course, they are definitely good dancers."*

Additionally, one advanced-level respondent stressed that wins alone are not enough to validate someone to teach.

*"They just believe that if you win a contest it validates you to teach. Imma tell you in this language – you don't change it – that's some bulls***."*

Based on the conversations, wins and prizes are proof of being a good dancer and as such, they do not validate or invalidate a teacher. The responses also showed that being a good teacher does not necessarily require being a good dancer, and that a good dancer does not necessarily become a good teacher – thus, implying that being a dancer is an earlier phase one must undergo before becoming a teacher. However, there is a connection between the two as a good teacher should be able to produce good dancers and create a foundation for further learning.

Another factor that the interviewees saw as an important part of being a teacher was constant personal development. Many interviewees mentioned that as the scene is shaped all the time, there is always something new to learn. As a result, a teacher should be devoted to continuous learning.

"[You become qualified] over the course of time. You learn something new all the time from someone and every teacher is different. So it's not black and white."

"To be honest, I know there are teachers out there that – let's just say that I hope they know something – but I can tell that I have not seen them at any workshops in Finland. How do I know if they have, say, lived in New York for a year and trained there actively but. Well I would not try their classes. "

"A teacher should strive to develop themselves and add to their expertise all the time. Things change, the scene advances and the styles evolve as the music evolves and so on. If you are not willing to challenge yourself, you are in the wrong business. All teaching is relies on staying up to date, all the time. "

"I should train so much more! Even though I have been doing this for years, I still try to take every workshop in Finland and sometimes abroad, […] and I analyse the teacher to become a better teacher myself. You know, why they teach certain things in that particular order and so on."

Among keeping up to date on recent events, the interviewees indicated several topics that they felt were integral to understanding the context and history of voguing. Four respondents explain that,

> *"You need to get back to where it all started. When [voguing] is what it is because of its roots and history and if you have no understanding of that, it is impossible to teach it as it is."*

> *"There are cases when for example different techniques have been mixed in classes. It is not like 'I know how to use my hands so I can teach vogue' – you need know the culture, the history and the background behind it all."*

> *"Too many people want to capitalize on movement without doing enough research. You have to swim in that sea long enough to get the flavour. "*

> *"If I have not seen someone in any of the workshops or panel discussions where the Americans are talking about the culture and where it is now, I think they are missing out some of the basics. So, I would not consider them legitimate."*

The interviewees also addressed the importance of being honest about the limitations and possible shortcomings of their knowledge to encourage the students to research the matter by themselves as well. Furthermore, six respondents highlighted the significance of giving credit where it is due, or in other words explaining who had taught them and where.

> *"I think that as a teacher, it is important to give references to where I have learned something and give credit to those who deserve it so that you can stand behind what you are teaching. If I get the feeling that something may not be okay, I won't do it."*

> *"Teachers need to start from somewhere but you need to stay honest and humble. You need to tell your students that there is so much more in this and that you don't know all of it."*

Although the interviewees were quite strict about truthfulness, they highlighted that a teacher should be careful about stating definitive truths to come across as more competent. Instead, one respondent preferred using the word 'inspiration'.

"I understand the idea that you're inspired by what you see and what you experienced in that short amount of time […] but obviously if it's not in your DNA – I mean if you didn't have enough time to let it settle – you're going back with an impression and your impression might be completely wrong. And you're going to be teaching people the wrong impression. So why didn't you just say you want to share your inspiration. It might not be exactly correct but you want to share something. But people are not that honest. "

These answers indicate that the teacher's task is to start the learning process of a student and encourage them to develop themselves instead of acting as an encyclopaedia or and omniscient guru of sorts. A teacher is more of a mentor who has the ability to make information easily understandable but they are not expected to provide all the information themselves. One interviewee described this as 'always a student, never a master'. Moreover, another respondent – who works as a teacher – pointed out that a teacher should not elevate themselves above the students but instead, work to benefit the learning of a student.

"Maybe the most important thing in being a teacher is that you are not there for yourself, you are there for the student. So, the student should be the star and the teacher is just a supporting actor. I think that that gets lost easily because of all the viral dance videos that have turned teachers into public figures."

The dilemma between readiness to teach and the requirement for constant learning came up during the conversations. Two interviewees suspected that they would have been ready to teach even now, but that they had grown into it after learning from their mistakes. One interviewee pointed out that there is no way to know for sure before you have tried it and only after a while, you see if it is for you or not. Another respondent said that it took them 19 years to decide they were ready to teach after finding out that people were requesting that. The validation from others came up in other interviews as well: one respondent said that despite having taught other dance styles for years, they were not sure about their legitimacy as a vogue teacher before someone higher in the hierarchy took their class and

complimented them. One advanced interviewee explained that it is important to be able to justify legitimacy as a teacher, stating that

> *"You need to be honest in your journey. Sooner or later when the real s*** walks into the room, your ass will be highly embarrassed. So, there's a saying 'don't write a check that you can't cash'."*

Three respondents reflected on the significance of a teacher's background, questioning whether they can teach if they differ from the original norm of a voguer. However, they considered other factors to be more important and concluded that as long as they explained the cultural history of voguing to their students, they were allowed to teach. Moreover, one respondent felt that if some of the founding members of the community had agreed to teach them and accepted them as members of the community, it clears them to teach, too.

4.1.4 Commercialization

The interviewees also reflected on the commercialization of voguing. This includes – but is not limited to – using voguing in music videos, behind artists in shows as back-up dancing, in TV shows and to some extent, dance classes at dance schools. We also discussed the possible appropriation and reappropriation of the culture in terms of legitimacy and financial gain.

First, the respondents' views on using voguing for commercial purposes are presented and analysed. One advanced-level respondent expressed their frustration.

> *"Too many people want to capitalize on movement without doing enough research. You have to have integrity. You have to swim in that sea long enough to get the flavour. "*

Their answer implies that in the process of wanting to benefit financially from a certain type of art, people are willing to take the fast track and therefore do not concern themselves with accurate representation. It seems that, in their opinion, making money by voguing is not a problem but the compromises made and shortcuts taken to get there

faster are. When that happens often enough and the wrong type of demonstration gains publicity, the interviewees feared that the universal idea of voguing would start to shift towards this simplified version. At the final stage of this scenario, voguing – or any other type of art or culture – would cease to exist as it originally was. Another comment from them supports this interpretation.

> *"All these kids are doing the choreography and they're doing it because the kids have a vision about being behind an artist, choreograph for an artist, or do television. They don't see beyond that, they don't see teaching, they don't see doing their own work because that whole concept is scary, you know. How am I going to live off on this? […] They're only concerned with the '-ish' and unfortunately the industry supports mediocracy. They're like 'oh oh oh give me something that's good enough' and they keep doing that. They're not concerned about getting it right.*
>
> *So I'm always telling the kids, sooner or later you'll be in the position to make choreography and you're pulling the shots and it's up to you to pull the best representation out there because you got to have integrity."*

In fact, this comment shows that they hope that voguers will strive for more visibility and accurate representation instead of protecting it from the general public, and as a result, they are preparing other dancers to stand their ground in the entertainment industry. This indicates that they fear that by protecting voguing from the public to keep it clean, the simplified version may take over. Another respondent added that they try to encourage voguers to appreciate themselves as artists.

> *"When someone complains about it, I tell them to act. Show them that you can do it better and ask for double the money."*

Two other interviewees shared this view and noted that using voguing for commercial purposes brings visibility and helps in establishing its position. However, even they expressed their concern over false representation online and pointed out that it is hard to control what type of material gains popularity among non-voguers. Meanwhile, one interviewee supported commercialization and stated that

"It's a good thing, it brings one more source of income to those that do [voguing]. But it becomes problematic if so-called professional dancers without any background or experience from voguing are used. It's wrong representation, it does not look right when people are just trying to mimic the movement. It's glued on, it's 'no-guing'."

Other interviewees shared this concern over using non-voguers in shows.

"It really is a big deal, there is a big difference in who has done the choreography. People get called out all the time, like 'ok, are you saying this was voguing?'. Popular dance shows, like, what the heck, why can't you just hire the voguers who actually know what they are doing. It happens in Finland to some extent as well and I'm not saying that they should pick me. But if you decide to use voguing on a big stage, you can see the commercialization and sometimes, it is just so painful to watch."

"If you want to use voguing for commercial purposes, do it right. Very often regular dancers are used and sadly, it shows."

Their comments reflect frustration over delivering a wrong image – not because someone else was hired, and consequently, got paid for doing that. One interviewee explained that they do not think that the choreographers and dancers in question want any harm but are, instead, simply uninformed.

"There is a lot of videos online and people are sharing them with angry captions to weed out 'the posers'. I don't believe in that. Instead, I try to share knowledge and videos that get it right so that maybe someday, that becomes the norm."

Additionally, one interviewee called for taking responsibility as a dancer and turning down jobs that they were not trained for. Moreover, one respondent saw some change for the better as well.

"I loved seeing Javier [Ninja] dancing for Madonna at Super Bowl. It is so great to see some artists finding out about things and using the real dancers and not just something that sells."

Finally, we discussed appropriation and the position of sexual minorities especially in the commercial context. The respondents described appropriation as an act where those who have, take from those who don't have. In other words, appropriation occurs when people in a better social or economic position benefit from something that was created by people in less fortunate positions. According to the interviewees, fear of appropriation usually stems from the fear of being forgotten – it is more difficult to control the level of consciousness and understanding of the culture when the amount of people involved rises. Two respondents representing different types of minorities explain the phenomenon.

"Some people in the US are hurt because there's a scene in Europe as well and we don't need to fly people here anymore. They're like 'you're kinda cute but you gotta make sure that if you have events and major balls, make sure that the representation is right. Make sure it stays real'. "

"I think what happens is the fear of being forgotten. [Because] for black Americans, it's the fear that when another culture appropriates what you do, all of a sudden, they will write a book and say you didn't exist. It's all an operation of fear. Fear of being forgotten […] I think it's like a reaction that when it becomes popular, you think that you got to protect it."

In general, the respondents felt that voguing is for anyone because of its empowering nature. When asked about the struggle that LGBTQ people and racial minorities face and how it feels when people that have not experienced that struggle are now taking part in the actions of the community and possibly financially gaining from it as teachers, dancers and choreographers, one advanced-level interviewee said that the source of the struggle is not relevant and that comparing struggle is difficult, even impossible.

"The word 'struggle' means something that can be difficult to overcome. Now everybody has their own struggle. You can't relate black American struggle to

struggle in Muslim countries, or in Russia or even Brazil. And when people have this option, let's say to choose to work or not, you think they got it easy. But think about it, if you give someone everything there's no ambition or drive to do anything new and after a while you become stagnant. That's a struggle in itself – because stagnation kills. So, I tell people out there that you can't claim your struggle."

From this quote, it can be concluded that although voguing and ballroom culture developed in the LGBTQ community, it can also be practiced outside that community without it being appropriation. However, if the cultural background is altogether forgotten, the situation may turn upside down.

"I don't like it that after voguing has become more popular, people have this idea that it's a dance for beautiful models and then these people are wondering why men do it."

The quote highlights a fear that at some point, people differing from the generally accepted norm of a "beautiful model" would be shunned from the community. Another respondent shared this concern and explained that it is still very difficult for trans people to secure gigs as promoters, agents and choreographers prefer CIS women with certain features such as blond hair, and certain body types. According to them, this is problematic especially because as a consequence, transgender dancers are excluded from productions and shows in favour of white, cis-gendered people. Thus, the industry benefits from something that was formed as a response to oppression that minorities faced for not being 'blond CIS women', but at the same time, the industry may refuse to use the people who represent these minorities in fear of the audience reacting badly to this. They also highlighted that very often dancers are categorised by their sex which makes it difficult for people that do not identity as CIS to find work.

4.2 Video analysis and archival research

4.2.1 Paris Is Burning

The film starts off with a quote painting a framework and describing the social struggles of being a black, gay man in New York in the late 1980s, as described by the father of one.

> *"You have 3 strikes against you in this world. Every black man has two - that they're just black and they're a male. But you're black, and you're a male and you're gay. You're gonna have a hard f****** time. And if you're going to do this, you're gonna have to be stronger than you ever imagined. "*

The quote highlights the sociological and political environment in which voguing has emerged. The interviewees in the documentary describe ballroom as a way to escape poverty and discrimination based on racial and sexual characteristics – in ballroom, it is possible to get a glimpse of the life that they normally would not be able to experience. As three interviewees explain,

> *"The balls, to us, is as close to reality as we're gonna get to all that fame and fortune and stardom and spotlights."*

> *"At the ball, you feel 100% okay being gay. And it's not like that in the world."*

> *"A ball is the very word: whatever you want to be, you be. So at a ball, you have a chance to display your arrogance, your seductiveness, your beauty, your wit, your charm, your knowledge. You can become anything and do anything, right here right now, and it won't be questioned. I came, I saw, I conquered. That's a ball."*

These statements highlight the empowering nature of ballroom culture and indicate that the members of the community consider it to be a safe haven of sorts. Furthermore, the community is portrayed as a supporting group of people, where even in competition situations the host encourages the audience to cheer on contestants for support. Similarly, houses were described to be a solution to the prejudice and oppression that sexual

minorities faced. As young gay men were being sent away from their homes, they started to search for something to fill that void. Furthermore, houses were referred to as families and gay street gangs whose credibility stemmed from balls.

While the documentary focuses on the ballroom culture as a whole, some definitions and comments can be pinpointed especially to dancers. For example, physical appearance and looks are mentioned multiple times and it is shown that an outfit that follows the theme and shows attention to detail is pivotal. The quotes below demonstrate the subtle line between success and failure.

"With that cigarette, you're giving me the banji girl effect. "

"Come on it's a known fact that a woman carries a bag at a dinnertime".

It is noteworthy that for the latter comment, the participant did not have a bag which resulted in a chop, suggesting that even the smallest mistakes could expose you – that you are not real. Similarly, in another clip, the contestant is seen arguing with the judge on whether the coat they were wearing was in fact a men's coat, as was required in the category. These incidents imply that the balls measure the contestants' ability to pass as something else and portray the fantasy, regardless of what they represent in their everyday lives.

As for innovativeness and quality of movement, the interviewees described unique, better moves and throwing the best shade as criteria for evaluation. The film shows multiple examples of winning movement and the relevance of attitude. For example, at one point a contestant is walking slowly and in a calculated manner with their chin up. To assert their dominance, they drop a piece of garment and leave it for someone else to pick up. This prompts applause from the host who urges other contestants to learn from them. Moreover, Willi Ninja, the godfather of voguing as described in the documentary, lists hieroglyphs and gymnastics as his inspiration, and explains that perfect lines and awkward positions are of essence in voguing. He also explicates that he turns his performances into a story and, using pantomime, expresses his opinion and assessment

of his competitor. Furthermore, Dorian Corey, another queen interviewed in the film, describes 'throwing shade' as follows,

> *"I don't tell you you're ugly, but I don't have to tell you because you know you're ugly."*

The quote above indicates that it is not about direct insults but suggesting something that will make the opponent question themselves.

Finally, the concept of fame and status has a central role in the narrative of the film as many interviewees admit that they dream of being rich and famous. Consequently, they feel that ballroom offers them an outlet for this desire and provides some of that fame – if ballroom is considered to be a fantasy world, gaining recognition in the ballroom is equivalent to being famous in the real world. This sense of recognition is evident in many interviews, especially with more distinguished members of the community. For instance, Pepper LaBeija – who first questions the need for presenting themselves and later describes themselves as "the *legendary* mother of the House of LaBeija – highlights the numebr of grand prizes and successful chilren at multiple occasions, suggesting that they attach great importance to them as legitimating factors. Furthermore, they focus on external, measurable criteria as basis for their status in the ballroom.

> *"I have the most members, I'm the most popular. So it speaks for itself."*

Interestingly, they never mention the opinion or evaluation of others as credit while Willi Ninja focuses on what others reckon, stating that "*they* say I'm the best voguer out there", thus highlighting the distinction between perceived criteria for validation. Paradoxically, regarding House of LaBeija, another interviewee pointed out that they "wouldn't be caught dead in that house", implying that while Pepper LaBeija considered their status to be unchallenged, others did not necessarily share this view.

4.2.2 Panel discussion

According to multiple members of the Finnish voguing community, panel discussions with foreign dancers are held regularly to discuss current matters. Four dancers were

interviewed by the attendees of the panel discussion: legendary Dashaun Wesley, iconic Jamal Milan, iconic Stanley Milan and iconic Marquis Revlon. Next, I will examine one such discussion that focused on legitimacy and appropriation.

First, when asked about the community in Finland, one of the participants pointed out that as the scene is still so young that it creates a possibility for Finnish dancers to shape it as they wish. As opposed to communities in some other countries, they described it as warm and welcoming, and as an example, mentioned that people hug each other even after losing. According to them, this indicates that the community is united and people get along well.

A majority of the discussion was spent on legitimacy and especially on characteristics that are peculiar to extraordinary dancers. The participants called for status and recognition especially in the case of teachers, and one of them listed the criteria they use for deciding if someone should teach others.

> *"When somebody wants to teach you, ask them: have you ever in the ballroom scene? Have you walked in a ballroom scene? Are you legendary in ballroom scene? Then why do you feel that you should teach me?"*

For one, the quote shows that they consider membership and activity in the community to be a starting point for legitimacy as a teacher but also highlight the significance of recognition from others in the form of being legendary. Furthermore, the statement implies that they expect teachers to be more accomplished than dancers.

As for what makes an extraordinary dancer, the participants had several points. First, they highlighted the importance of choosing a category based on personal fit instead of trying to fit themselves into a category. In other words, trying to achieve characteristics required for a certain category is more difficult than embracing what one already has, and may result in worse results. Furthermore, they brought about that this extends to choosing to walk only after seeing the descriptions and themes for each category, in order to evaluate whether one can carry out the theme as well as is needed to win. One interviewee explained the significance of outfit and appearance.

"You have a fair chance to win because they see your creativity and how you took the idea. If your outfit is on point, your confidence is showing and sometimes, just your outfit can get you through. If your outfit fits the category and is outside the norm, that's when you start to step up."

In other words, talent and skills as a dancer are not the only criteria for success but at times, outfit, appearance and accuracy following the theme can override technical ability.

Second, they discussed different elements and components regarding quality of movement, especially in the new way category. One participant noted that when judging, they look for character in the face, lines, and different textures of movement. They described new way as very detailed and abstract, with emphasis on straight lines and flexibility.

"Visually it has to look amazing. Think outside the box – if you just come there just to stretch, it's not vogue."

Moreover, they stressed staying within the foundation but at times, commended testing the boundaries for a more interesting show. Another interviewee highlighted the importance of emotion and music, and gave specific instructions on how to express music in a way that it catches attention.

"There's a base beat and especially in a competition, when you do that special move that you have, to that base ending beat – that's when you're gonna get the most points, that's when it's most effective. It's like a period to your sentence. You just have to fill in the rest."

"The song tells you what to do, you don't want the song to lead you, and you want to look like you're leading the song. When you hear crashes in the beginning of the song, it's usually poses."

On top of serving as instructions on musicality, these quotes imply that a good dancer can also predict the music and follow certain guidelines that are accepted within the community – that there is a certain way to express music.

Finally, the participants reflected on appropriation and commercialization. The views on white people voguing varied, as one interviewee said that it is not appropriation if one is a member of the community and taking part in it, while another one remarked that the motivation might be different for people with different backgrounds.

> *"It's not a struggle for you. It has become a dance for you because you don't have to prove anything other than that you're having a good time."*

Following this statement, the interviewee expressed that it is media that appropriates ballroom, not voguers, as people that are not involved are presenting vogue through social media. Another participant continued that while it is a good thing that voguing is spreading, it is unfortunate for the culture that the 'wrong' people are doing it, resulting in misleading representation.

4.3 Summary of the findings

This chapter started by investigating the perceptions of nine members of the ballroom culture and continued to analyse two secondary sources of data – one documentary and a panel discussion. The chapter analysed the perceptions on legitimacy, its components and criteria, as well as the process of gaining status under four subheadings: ballroom as a community, dancers as part of the community, education and teachers, and commercialization. Furthermore, houses as an organization, status and titles were discussed as a part of dancers as part of the community.

First, the concept of voguing and ballroom as a concepts were explored. Based on the empirical material, knowledge of the history is at the core of understanding the characteristics of the culture and community. As voguing as a dance is part of the ballroom culture, many of the practices stem from that and thus these two cannot be completely separated from each other. According to the interviews, information changes constantly and opinions and impressions vary, creating challenges in defining legitimacy.

Based on the empirical materials, ballroom and voguing are founded on respect, acceptance and lack of discrimination and oppression. The connection between LGBTQ

and ballroom communities was mentioned several times both in interviews and secondary data, and understanding and respecting this was considered vital. However, participating in the actions of the community regardless of one's background was not seen as a problem as long as there was respect towards the original history and culture. Additionally, voguing was described as empowerment as well as an outlet for suppressed emotions and qualities. Finally, all of the interviewees also referred to voguing as 'doing', calling it a hobby or a profession, perhaps highlighting the fact that in Europe, voguing was first introduced as a dance and only after that as a culture.

Next, dancers as part of the community were studied. According to the materials, initiation happens usually through friends that are already members of the community, or through dance schools. The role of events and media was also mentioned, but it was given much smaller significance. The interviewees highlighted that it is not unusual for people to develop an interest towards voguing before they are familiar with the culture that is related to it.

Following this, characteristics of a vogue dancer were investigated and several definitive factors came up. Based on the conversations, the most important feature based on all empirical material was involvement in the community – this served as a starting point for all the discussion that followed. Additionally, understanding history and culture, knowledge on theory, activity in the community, and quality of performance were listed.

Being familiar with the history and culture was viewed as a necessity - respecting the history and roots of the culture was considered to be a precondition for membership in the ballroom community. Many other legitimating factors leaned on this assumption, such as accuracy in a category (that is, knowing what is expected and why). Furthermore, understanding and respecting the values and norms of the community were mentioned multiple times as a basis for participation for people that originally came from outside the community. The components of legitimacy as a dancer are compiled in the table below (Table 3.).

	What it means?	Examples
Activity	Amount of time used	Attending balls, training, organizing event, taking part in the discussion
History	Knowing where the culture is coming from	Where does ballroom culture stem from? Who are the founders?
Theory	Being familiar with basic terminology and concepts	What is relevant in each category?
Culture	Understanding the values, norms, symbols and language characteristic to voguing	What does "throwing shade" mean?
Performance	Technique, attitude, creativity	What is the correct way to execute a dip?

Table 3 - Definition of a voguer

When discussing the components of the dance itself, six categories were introduced – technique and precision, accuracy in a category, attitude and performance, appearance, creativity, and musicality. Interestingly, the respondents valued different qualities depending on their level of expertise. Beginners mentioned technique and precision multiple times and seemed to value them over other criteria but used it more as an umbrella term instead of specifying different parts of it. Middle-level respondents, on the other hand, were able to specify more closely certain technical elements that they considered important. However, both groups were explicit in that flawless technique alone is not enough. Finally, advanced interviewees mentioned technique or precision as factors promoting legitimacy far fewer times than other respondents and it was more often covered as a starting point. In general, they valued creativity, originality and musicality. These differences may stem from attainability: according to advanced members, technique is a starting point, a base for everything else, and most likely, that is the stage

that beginners are still struggling with so they pay more attention to it. Similarly, by this point, advanced-level dancers have become accustomed to it so they use other evaluation criteria for distinguishing exceptional talent. These characteristics are presented in more detail in the table below (Table 4).

	What it means?
Technique and precision	Mastering the technique, controlled movement, execution
Accuracy in a category	Knowing the specific demands of a certain category; mastering the style
Attitude and performance	Character, stage presence, confidence, "owning the place"
Appearance	Outfit, makeup; carrying out the theme
Creativity	Personality and originality
Musicality	Knowing the music, being able to predict it

Table 4 - Qualities of a good dancer

Additionally, titles and status in the community were explored. Based on the materials, there is a clear, indisputable hierarchy that is, to a great extent, based on merit. Distinguished members of the community can be attributed certain titles by people in the hierarchy. Both the process and the structure were described, and based on the analysis, the status of titleholders is considered basically irrefutable. Titles are granted publicly in balls by distinguished members of the community after careful, methodological consideration, and each step has a certain foundation for evaluation.

The first step is a *star*. This requires 2-3 years of active participation and having a distinctive style with imaginative and innovative performances. *Statements* come after stars. They have passed all the 'star' criteria, have been active for 3-6 years, and are battling legends and winning multiple balls. At the next level, *legends* have travelled in different regions, are well known throughout the ballroom community and have been selected 'Of the Year's' multiple times. Finally, an *icon* is someone who has been through all the stages and has been active up to 20 years. They have thrown functions, run a house and their actions have changed the scene or their category. The characteristics of different titles are presented in table 5.

Title	Criteria	Merits	Years active
A star	Own style; quick-thinking; innovative	-	2-3 years
A statement	Star criteria + battles legends; distinctive style	Multiple wins; OTY	3-6 years
A legend	Statement criteria + personifies a category; known all over the community	Multiple wins; multiple OTY	6-15 years
An icon	Legend criteria + changed the scene or their category; run a house; thrown events	Multiple wins and awards	15-20 years

Table 5 - Titles in the ballroom culture

Furthermore, houses as organizations were investigated. According to the materials, houses were originally a replacement for a family, and thus, many attributes connected to them can be traced back to family structures. Houses are run by mothers and fathers, followed by different roles depending on the house. Based on the interviews, the position of a parent is usually stalwart, and it is considered highly disrespectful to try and replace

a parent. Members of a house answer to the parents, whereas the parents take responsibility for the development and success of their children. Houses serve as a motivational environment and according to the findings, the members often train together to benefit the house as a whole and cheer each other on at balls.

Impressions on criteria for membership varied but a few factors recurred. First, potential for development and willingness to actively participate in the actions of the house and community were mentioned. Second, close relationships with existing house members were deemed important, and third, personal style and innovativeness were considered. On the other hand, technique and quality of performance were not listed as a prerequisite, and wanting to become a member was in fact noted as a turnoff. While the materials prove that house membership brings legitimacy as it shows potential and approval of someone higher in the hierarchy, it is not a prerequisite for legitimacy nor does it automatically result in a higher rank.

Next, education and legitimacy as a teacher were discussed. As a starting point, it became clear that there is no official degree or a syllabus to become a vogue dancer. According to the interviews, this is because urban dances such as voguing were born in clubs and other urban settings and consequently, it is impossible to capture the nature of them by training solely in dance classes. Three different learning methods (Table 6) were uncovered: dance classes and workshops; apprenticeship; and self-study. Self-study was most often related to learning about *history* and *basic terminology* as well staying up to date of current conversation, while apprenticeship was mainly used for *technique, performance,* and *understanding the culture*. Finally, dance classes and workshops were referred to for all five components.

Additionally, the importance of each way of learning differed depending on experience and status. As for legitimacy as a teacher, the criteria matched that of a dancer's to a certain extent. Involvement in the community, constant development, understanding of the history and culture, and honesty and humbleness were listed as qualities that are required from a teacher. However, the question of merits and titles was on the table and no clear answer to that was identified. While some admitted that good dancers – and thus,

dancers with prizes and merits – were not always good teachers and that there are many qualified teachers that do not win their category at a ball, others considered merits from balls to be a prerequisite. One attendee of a panel discussion went as far as requiring a teacher to be a legend, which according to the criteria listed above, demands multiple wins and prizes.

	Dance classes	Apprenticeship	Self-study
History	x		x
Theory, terminology	x		x
Culture	x	x	
Technique	x	x	
Performance	x	x	

Table 6 - Different learning methods

Finally, commercialization and cultural appropriation were explored. Although dissenting opinions were also expressed, the findings based on empirical material suggest that using voguing for commercial purposes was deemed acceptable, given a few conditions. Overall, using voguing in music videos, dance shows and behind artists was met with positivity as it gives visibility to the culture and provides members of the community with a source of income. Likewise, accurate public representation by legitimate voguers was seen as important in order to protect voguing from simplification and losing its cultural significance. Nonetheless, some concerns were also voiced. First, using dancers with no background in voguing was considered disrespectful and seen as a threat to the culture – in doing so, voguing becomes just a dance with no cultural context. Moreover, the entertainment industry's tendency to favour certain type of dancers raised concerns as transgender dancers were seen as having difficulty finding work as dancers.

Meanwhile, the industry was seen in a perplexing situation, where it benefits from a culture that was formed in a response to oppression faced by minorities, but at the same time, excludes them by refusing to employ the people who represent these minorities.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis examined the definition and perception of legitimacy among voguers in the ballroom community. The study was constructed of an academic literature review of voguers, legitimacy as an artist, and qualitative empirical research of the understanding and perception of legitimacy among members of the ballroom community in Finland and abroad, as well as documentation of the cultural context.

Legitimacy and 'passing' as an artist has been in the scope of researchers for decades and several propositions has been made. In fields that do not require or hold official degrees, legitimacy stems from the evaluation and criteria defined by other people (e.g. Ellemers, Doosje and Spears, 2013; Bernstein, et al., 2010; Martimianakis, Maniate and Hodges, 2009). Ballroom community and voguers offer an excellent environment for this study as a spontaneously formed community with a relatively extensive and advanced power structure.

This study examines the legitimacy of voguers by investigating (1) what the components of legitimacy in a ballroom community are, and (2) how legitimacy is perceived in the ballroom scene.

5.1. Discussion of the key findings

The goal of this study was to complement previous research on legitimacy and urban culture. The study investigated previous documentary and discussion within the community together with interviews with members of the community to form a coherent picture of the phenomenon at the moment. The literature review formed a firm basis for understanding and discussing legitimacy as an artist, and helped in pinpointing relevant factors from the interviews and other material. Based on the empirical material, the views and criteria for legitimacy had not changed during the course of time but geographical location played a role in the premise of the culture in general. The main findings contribute to previous research by providing insight concerning legitimacy and respect in urban cultures with strong historical and cultural backgrounds.

The discussion of the main findings starts with evaluating the significance of each dimension that defines artist legitimacy, as proposed in the academic literature review. These criteria were found to be: amount of time devoted to artistic work, earnings from artistic work, recognition and respect among other artists and reputation among general public, quality of artistic work, membership in a professional artists' group or association, qualifications and education, subjective self-identification as an artist, and background. Then, the importance of each criterion will be reviewed.

First, following Martimianakis, Maniate and Hodges (2009) views on legitimacy and professionalism, it was evident that the right to define legitimacy within voguers stems from the community itself instead of general public. Especially the interviewees were clear that only members of the community know enough of the matter to qualify what is true in the field. Martimianakis, Maniate and Hodges (2009) questioned that this creates a dilemma of whose standards are used, and in the case of voguers, the findings suggest that there is some confusion over on what grounds the membership of the community is granted. However, the criteria became clearer when defining status and titles, implying that as the level of legitimacy and certain professionalism rose, the standards were more refined.

The findings suggest that legitimacy as a voguer stems from being a known member of the community. The initiation often happens through existing members and is solidified through active participation in the community. 'Knowing the right people' came up multiple times, highlighting the communal nature of the culture. Legitimacy is fuelled by attending events and delivering high-quality work and, consequently, winning prizes and working for the good of the community. This follows Schloss' (2009) statements that in urban cultures, skills and willingness to showcase them regularly adds to respect and legitimacy. These factors also serve as a criteria for house membership – which can also further legitimacy – and status inside the house and within the community as a whole. Interestingly, house membership does not define legitimacy in the same as membership in a crew does for b-boys (Schloss, 2009). This may be due to the individual nature of voguing as every dancer performs alone, even if other house members are present.

As for houses, they follow a clear, family-like hierarchy where children answer to the parents of the house, and parents are, respectively, responsible for the house and make the final call concerning decision such as new members. Regarding the power structure of the community, four titles with clear, explicit were presented. These titles were considered unchangeable, again contradicting with Schloss' (2009) views on the instability of status among b-boys.

Next, the significance of the amount of time used was discussed. When evaluating the amount of time used in artistic work, it is essential to distinguish between the two different dimensions, short term and long term. In this thesis, short term refers to the amount of time used right now – training, attending to balls, organizing events, taking part in the discussion, and so on – while long term refers to the time spent with the ballroom scene in the long run – developing the scene and leaving a mark, for example.

Time spent in the ballroom scene as a legitimator was mentioned regularly and on all levels of expertise. Regarding short term involvement, it was often connected to active participation in the actions of the community. In order to be legitimate and respected, one needs to actively attend events as well as training sessions and workshops, but also work for the community in other ways such as organizing events and participating in the discussion. Time spent in the ballroom also brings visibility and thus, plays a role in determining one's status. As for long term involvement, it was commonly accepted that it takes time to become a good dancer and that demonstration in the course of time plays a role in determining one's legitimacy, but differences emerged when discussing the significance and results of long-term commitment.

Beginners did not view long-term commitment as an inevitable factor that promoted respect – they felt that it simply takes time to gain the qualities that make you legitimate. However, middle-level respondents remarked that especially statements take time and that it is expected that one spends a long time in the ballroom before they are considered influential, despite their number of wins and other merits. These findings support Bain's (2005) hypothesis that time spent among art shows commitment and indicates professionality, to the extent that artists may even disregard the work of others if they feel

that they have not shown adequate commitment and compromise for the benefit of the art. In the case of voguers, artistic results may not be enough to be considered legitimate if the amount of time is considered inadequate by the community. However, the data also shows that in some cases, extensive merits may outrun amount of time used, suggesting that it is not the most important criterion when determining someone's legitimacy.

Furthermore, *time spent* is not considered a valid indicator without specific criteria – for example, people training in dance schools may use multiple hours a week practicing for a spring show but they would still not be considered legitimate due to lack of interaction with the community. This disagrees with Butler's (2000) suggestion of using amount time as defining factor. Although it would be simple to count hours, this method was not considered adequate, as it fails to account for the quality of work or dedication to develop the culture.

As for income from artistic work, according to Karttunen (1998), using income as a criterion for legitimacy is another popular method used by officials to identify artists. However, she continues to point out that artists do not generally share this view, and the empirical findings of this study are in line with this statement. Although income from voguing was considered to be a positive thing, it did not come up in any of the discussions or other materials as a prerequisite for calling someone legitimate.

It is noteworthy that while Karttunen (1998) suggests that artists are usually indifferent in terms of money, the premise for ballroom and voguing was admiration and jealousy of rich people. Furthermore, voguers do not seem to completely share McLeod's (1999) views on jeopardizing legitimacy due to using voguing for commercial purposes – to a great extent, it was seen as positive and almost essential for accurate representation in the public. Nonetheless, 'selling out' solely on financial motives was considered to be disrespectful against the culture, echoing McLeod's earlier findings, as voguers were not willing to change their art in exchange for higher income. Moreover, using voguing for financial motives only was condemned.

Third, respect and recognition were discussed. In the literature review, respect was divided under two sub-headlines – respect as a social concept and the dimensions of respect. According to Huo, Binning and Molina (2010), respect is a reflection of the collective assessment. This is evident among voguers, too, and the empirical material strongly supports this claim, as it shows constant discussion about legitimacy within the community. Furthermore, the social nature of voguing – like other urban dances – highlights the importance of correct social evaluation as people in certain positions have the right and responsibility to represent culture and act as role models to new members. Additionally, it implies that there are matters that are important to the community as a whole. Down the line, staying true to the roots of the culture and respecting its history is evidently considered to be the most important thing to keep in mind, a sort of a starting point. As this serves as a foundation for many things and attributes within the ballroom community, the interviewees stressed that to be respected, one absolutely needs to share this point of view and actively promote it.

In proportion, forgetting the cultural background and treating voguing as 'only a dance' for commercial purposes was considered indefensible at all points. It is also noteworthy that respect and positive evaluation from outside the community is not necessarily deemed relevant or positive. Following Ellermers, Doosje and Spears' (2004) findings, trying to please the general public at the expense of the integrity of one's art decreases legitimacy - even though it seems that voguers want the general public to like voguing as an art form to help with visibility, they hold on to accurate representation and are afraid of watering down the culture. Finally, considering the historical background of voguing as a safe haven for outcasts of society and the disputes over legitimacy between voguers in the US and Europe, it is clear that DeLellis' (2000) and Harkness' (2010) claims that respect is bound to context, time and place is supported by the data of this study. However, titles and statements were described to be practically infinitive and not up for discussion.

As for dimensions of respect, Huo, Binning and Molina (2010) have listed three dimensions that can be used to define perceived respect: 1. Individuals' perceptions of their own worth to the group (perceived status), 2. Individuals' sense of inclusion within

the group (perceived liking), and 3. Fair and respectful treatment from peers (treatment quality). Furthermore, Spears, Ellemers and Doosje (2005) point out that respect has traditionally been viewed as fair, deferential and neutral treatment, or as something that is based on liking or authority, but it can also result from competence and expertise. The empirical findings of this paper follow this division, as respect was mentioned on several occasions and at times, was even used as a synonym for legitimacy, especially when listing a set of attributes, skills and accomplishments that promote passing as a voguer. Furthermore, respect came up multiple times when asked about hierarchies and power structures in the ballroom community, and finally, it was brought up as a fundamental premise of equality and safe space that originates from the history of ballroom culture and voguing as a part of LGBTQ community.

Respect that is based on perceived status is fairly static and impersonal and it can be derived from either a position or a place in hierarchy (DeLellis, 2000). It can also stem from competence and skills which have helped an individual to gain respect among one's peers (Spears, Ellemers and Doosje, 2005; Harkness, 2011), resulting in stable and subjective evaluation. Interestingly, unlike many other urban cultures, ballroom is highly hierarchical and the power structures are quite clear and undebatable. Perhaps surprisingly, the level of knowledge and willingness to talk about the processes and criteria increased along with the level of experience and status, suggesting that community members lower in the hierarchy do not really concern themselves with why someone has the status they have, thus, supporting DeLellis' (2000) claim that status can be seen as a given . Moreover, merits and wins play a significant role in deserving respect and act as a requirement for a variety of titles and positions. Assuming that these are based on talent and skill, according to Spears, Ellemers and Doosje (2005) and Harkness (2011), it can be anticipated that status in the ballroom is also based on competence and skills. Contrary to Spears, Ellemers and Doosje (2005), exceptional talent did not surface as a threat in the empirical data. This may be due to the organizational structure of the voguing community and houses – even though house members represent their house at all times, they compete as individuals, possibly excluding the need for working for the common good at the expense of individual success.

Finally, respect between individuals was brought up in all conversations. In particular, the importance of a safe space that includes all types of people was mentioned multiple times, and it became evident through comments such as 'voguing is for everyone', 'no one is discriminated against based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or race' and 'respect towards everyone is considered to be an important value in the community'. Moreover, in spite of the competitive, sometimes ruthless nature of ballroom, the interviewees emphasized that battle is supposed to be left on the floor – in other words, even though battle is an essential part of voguing, it is not based on actual dispute.

Next, the quality of work is discussed. While the quality of art is a difficult concept to define (Karttunen, 1998), the study found a list of attributes that can be further sorted into six categories: technique and execution, accuracy within a category, attitude and performance, appearance, creativity; and musicality.

Based on the findings, technique and precision cannot be separated from each other, following the work of Krasnow and Chatfield (2009). In voguing, mastering technique may show differently depending on the style in question, but common threads across styles are sharp and clean lines, controlled and precise movement, flexibility, variation in the use of force, and overall execution. Interestingly – unlike in many other dance styles, such as jazz, ballet or modern dance – pirouettes, jumps and other traditionally required technical elements were not listed, distinguishing voguing from dance styles taught in academies. Furthermore, even though technique was mentioned regularly in interviews and other material, it was not considered to be the most important asset of a good vogue dancer. In addition, the importance of technique as a legitimator differed between levels, most advanced dancers mentioning it far fewer times.

Moreover, attitude and performance were considered an integral part of voguing and ballroom, to the extent that they would overrule flawless technique. Krasnow and Chatfield (2009) recognize the importance of emotive expression as well, but unlike in voguing, their evaluation is still primarily based on technique, and only after that on emotions and expression. This suggests that commonly used evaluation for the quality of movement does not meet the requirements of voguing.

Accuracy in a category and appearance were highlighted several times. As opposed to other criteria, they were the only ones that could cause an immediate chop even if everything else was flawless. Interestingly, this seems to contradict Karttunen (1998) who pointed out that in art, to exist is to differ but that in terms of accuracy and appearance, breaking the rules is not respected. However, the demand for creativity in the voguing community supports this statement.

Regarding membership, in this study, houses were used as an example of a professional artist group. Based on the findings, having a house name grants credibility to a dancer and creates a presumption that you are going to bring something special to the floor, as that is the reason you have been invited to a house in the first place, thus echoing Bain's (2005) premises on reasons for obtaining membership. However, as one interviewee noted, it does not hold intrinsic value per se – a good dancer that is not in a house may be more respected, and hence, more legitimate than a house member who is not as talented, if they are considered to be a better dancer. It is noteworthy that in spite of the social nature of voguing, membership in a group is not considered as essential as in other urban dances (Schloss, 2010). Nonetheless, following Schloss' notions, houses serve as places for practise and artistic inspiration. Furthermore, house representation in a ball and using house names as stage names may help voguers to perform better and promote visibility and hence, status, as was also mentioned in earlier literature (Bain, 2005; Chang, 2005, Scholl, 2009).

Next, the qualifications and educational system are evaluated. Based on the findings, there are three ways to learn within the voguing community – dance classes, apprenticeship and self-study – following the claims in the literature review. However, the weight of each method varied. According to Koff and Mistry (2012) and Karttunen (1998), official degrees are the most commonly accepted form for artistic qualifications, although Karttunen points out that this may exclude self-taught artists. However, education from academies and universities does not promote legitimacy among voguers, or as Schloss (2009) says, urban dancers in general. Findings in this study suggest that this is because the art form was born in urban settings and as such, it is considered to be

impossible to teach in classrooms. While the results of this study agree with premises presented in the literature regarding apprenticeship, even self-study is considered to be a valid method for learning as long as it leads to being familiar with commonly accepted truths. This disagrees with Bain's (2005) theorization that argued that trained artists may look down on other forms of education.

Interestingly, although self-study and apprenticeship are valued as methods of education, self-identification as a voguer is not generally acceptable. Based on the empirical findings, in order to be considered legitimate, the community needs to accept that. Furthermore, claiming certain roles or titles is not tolerable as they are also based on collective evaluation. This does not follow UNESCO's ideal of defining artists but meets Schloss' (2009) and Bain's (2005) reflection on recognition from peers.

Finally, the question of background as a legitimating factor was investigated in this study. Even though McLeod (1999) argues that descent can determine whether one can pass as a legitimate representative of their art form, based on the findings, this this does not carry the same weight in the ballroom community, where inclusion is valued. Furthermore, as the originators and pioneers of the culture have agreed to teach and engage even unconventional voguers such as white CIS-women, it has granted legitimacy to them, too. However, such practices still strike a chord in New York and therefore, regularly surface in debates in Finland as well. Even though the interviewees' attitudes on the matter were not as radical, it is obvious that this topic resonates with members of the community and it is considered something that should not be forgotten.

To sum up, the findings of this study express that legitimacy in ballroom is dependent on social evaluation of one's activity, skills, values and perceived status. In other words, membership and active involvement in the community is considered to be a starting point for legitimacy. It is noteworthy that even in the case of dancers, simply dancing was not deemed to be enough for gaining legitimacy, but rather, developing the culture in other ways was also considered a necessity. Likewise, understanding and appreciation of the historical and cultural context in which ballroom and voguing emerged were mentioned

as crucial for membership in the community. However, they were not alone considered enough to grant legitimacy.

5.2 Concluding remarks

This thesis has explored the factors that define legitimacy and passing as a voguer in the ballroom community. To tackle this issue, I investigated components and perceptions of legitimacy among voguers and looked into the process of gaining legitimacy and status. The literature review revealed the undefined nature of legitimacy of artists and highlighted the challenges deriving from lack of formal validation. Based on previous literature on the professionality of artists, urban culture and respect, a framework for evaluating the legitimacy of voguers was created. Furthermore, in order to give a better understanding of the scope of the study, the history of ballroom culture and voguing was briefly explained.

The findings of this study highlight the communal nature of ballroom culture and prove that perception of legitimacy among voguers is created in a social setting. Possibly due to this, *amount of time* used and active involvement in the community, even outside being a dancer, were considered valuable and essential. Moreover*, respect* from and towards others was deemed a foundation for legitimacy. Respect in the ballroom community can be perceived as equality, or it can stem from skills and merits, or status given by the community. Contrary to many other urban cultures, extensive and hierarchical power structures play a role in defining legitimacy. However, status is based on following the rules and conceptions of the community, as well as perception of talent and skill, or in other words, the *quality of work*.

According to the findings, quality of work is based on both execution of movement and cultural and historical knowledge, which in turn stems from *education*. However, as there is no official degree or schooling, the act of learning was valued instead of completing studies, suggesting that having an art degree is not relevant in the ballroom community. Additionally, *membership* in a house brings legitimacy to members to some extent but even non-members can and are often considered just as legitimate. Moreover, earnings

from artistic work, self-identification and the relevance of background were explored. The findings show that none of these hold legitimating value in the scope of this study.

Finally, this thesis sheds light on the process of gaining legitimacy and status, and shows that unlike in urban cultures in general, power structures are strong, clearly defined and stable. This would create a fruitful basis for a more extensive study on how such structures have emerged and how they are perceived in a community that is organically formed and lacks formal qualifications. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the other members of the ballroom community were not studied – however, as voguing is part of ballroom culture, it would be fruitful to investigate the matter from their point of view as well.

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APPENDIX 1: VOCABULARY

This vocabulary is based on conversations with the interviewees and Houseofnaphtali.tripod.com. (n.d.). Ball Slang, Categories, and Everything About Vogue. [online] Available at: http://houseofnaphtali.tripod.com/id3.html [Accessed 16 Apr. 2018].

Battle

When one voguer challenges another, in or out of a ball.

Child

A member of the house; a "child" to the mother or father.

Father

A house leader, without regard to gender.

House

A social group, clique, club, posse, family, fraternity.

Icon

A ballroom history maker; beyond the status of a Legend.

Legend(ary)

A multi-trophy winner, with a ballroom history; a veteran.

Mother

A house leader, without regard to gender.

New Way

The vogueing styles starting in the 90's.

Old Way

The vogueing styles previous to the 80's.

Queens

Gay males, regardless to which end of the masculine or feminine scale they choose to identify with.

Princess

A title given to a house member who is going to be the next house mother.

Reading

The art of insults; finding a flaw in your opponent and verbally showcasing and exaggerating it.

Shade; throwing shade

Underhanded dealings; subtle insult

Snatch

To win

Vogue Femme

A dance style that takes the femme queen technique and exaggerates it even further: pronounced hip movement, cha-cha-based footwork (often in stocking-feet for maximum slide), peppered with classic striptease gestures. Execution ranges from soft and dainty to dramatic and severe.

Walk

To enter a category.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Voguing and ballroom as concepts
   1.1. Tell me about voguing, what does it mean to you?
   1.2. What is essential to you in voguing? What do you feel are the most essential parts of voguing that people inside and outside the community should know?

2. Organizational structure
   2.1. How about the community, houses and so on, how do they work?
   2.2. Can you describe the "organizational structure" of the community (houses/community as a whole)? Is there such a thing?

3. Status
   3.1. How does one gain respect from others in the voguing community?
   3.2. Can you describe the 'process' of eg. becoming a house member or a parent or a pioneer?
      3.2.1. Can you give some examples of people that have gained that status?
      3.2.2. Can you give some examples of people that have claimed that status without being entitled to it?
   3.3. How does that show in e.g. balls and so on?

4. Dancers as part of the community
   4.1. How would you describe a vogue dancer?
      4.1.1. What are the most important qualities a good dancer has or a not-so-good dancer lacks?
   4.2. How about the voguing scene in Finland, what is it like?
   4.3. Are you a part of that scene? How did you become a part of that scene?
   4.4. Tell me about how a new dancer who is interested in voguing, usually gets started?
   4.5. Where and how do you, yourself, usually train? Alone/with someone?

5. Teachers as part of the community
   5.1. In your opinion, who is qualified to teach others?
   5.2. What are the most important features for a teacher? Can you give an example?
      5.2.1. How does one attain these qualities?
   5.3. Do you feel that there is enough qualified teachers in Finland?
      5.3.1. (If yes) How would you make sure that this is the case in the future as well?

5.3.2. (If not) How does that make you feel?
5.3.2.1. How would you solve this problem?

6. Commercialization
   6.1. In regards to commercial shows and dance classes, have you seen one/taken one?
   6.2. How do/did you feel about them?
   6.3. What is good/what could be better?
   6.4. Finally, how do you feel about white CIS-people in Finland doing vogue and possibly profiting financially from it?